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Athens Historian

Volume 24-25

2025



Published by the
Athens Historical Society
Athens, Georgia

Athens Historian

Journal of Local History, Athens, Georgia

Volume 24-25

2025

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On the cover: *The Model and Training School* was established in 1904 by black educator Miss Judia C. Jackson in a black community called "The Settlement" on the Danielsville Road. It offered both academic and vocational education to local African American students to prepare them for success. Closed in 1956, the building still exists, across the road from SAIL LTL Freight Company. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, used with permission.

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**A Call to Remember: Three Generations of
 Jackson and Brydie Educators on North Finley Street**

By Jane McPherson

North Finley Street, as it runs from Broad towards West Hancock, marks the eastern edge of what is now Athens’s Reese Street Historic District.¹ On the east side of the street, massive new student apartment buildings—The William and The Rambler—rise. The new buildings—and their undergraduate inhabitants—overwhelm their surroundings and obscure the sky, along with the habits and memories of the Black community that developed and thrived in this space beginning just after Emancipation.²

Though the local Reese Street Historic District now protects the built environment in several blocks of the neighborhood, it could not protect the area from the forces—including racism, political disenfranchisement, and zoning classifications—that were already in motion, forces which combined to enable the displacement of a Black, native-Athenian community and to replace it with hundreds of transient, affluent, and largely white college students.³

If, as Ned Kaufman writes, the “ultimate goal” of historic preservation is to create “places where people can live well and connect to meaningful narratives about history, culture, and identity,” then those goals are only partially accomplished on North Finley Street and in the adjacent Reese Street District.⁴ While the University of Georgia students in the neighborhood appear to be living well, currently there is little to connect them with the area’s history, culture, and

¹ There are two historic districts with slightly different boundaries that encompass the Reese Street District: The National Register Historic District was established in 1987; and the local historic district, which preserves the built environment by regulating how district structures can be remodeled or built, was established in 2008. North Finley Street functions as the eastern boundary for both districts, and in this paper, all references refer to the local district.

² Michael L. Thurmond, *A Story Untold: Black Men and Women in Athens History*, 3rd ed., (Athens, GA: Deeds Publishing, 2019).

³ Amelia M. Andrews, “Reese Street’s Last Stand: An African American Local Historic District’s Fight to Retain Community and Identity,” Master’s thesis (University of Georgia, 2024).

⁴ Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.

identity.⁵ Still, it is not too late for Athens to preserve and celebrate the stories of this remarkable neighborhood, and to honestly explore the forces that enabled the dissolution of a once-thriving Black community.

In this paper, I will begin this project of preservation, celebration, and exploration with a few of the modest, family-sized houses that remain on the west side of North Finley. Facing their enormous new neighbors, these houses—at 193, 223, and 249 North Finley—stand like dutiful sentries or old souls guarding the gates of the Reese Street Historic District. What remarkable histories do these houses hold?



For me, those histories begin with Judia Jackson Harris (1870-1960).⁶ Jackson Harris was an Athens-born educator who organized Black sharecropping families in rural Clarke County beginning in 1900.⁷ Together, the farmers and Jackson Harris purchased land, improved farming practices, and built what she thought of as a “model rural settlement.”⁸ The Model and Training School she established there in 1903 still stands (reopened as a Rosenwald School in 1928) on the Danielsville Road, and her memory is honored in the name of the nearby J. J. Harris Elementary School, founded in 2009.

The more I learned about Jackson Harris’s educational projects—rooted as they were in her belief in the power of collective action—the more curious I became about her family of origin, the collective that had launched her. Though Jackson Harris’s name is memorialized on Athens’s northern periphery, my explorations into her life and work led me back to North Finley Street in Athens’s center.



Born in 1870, just five years after her parents and her four oldest siblings had been emancipated from slavery, Judia grew up on land that was owned by her

⁵ There is at least one historic marker in the neighborhood. The Georgia Historical Society erected a marker for the Athens High and Industrial School at the corner of Pope and Reese Streets in 2010. See https://www.georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/athens-high-and-industrial-school/.

⁶ For more on Judia Jackson Harris, see Michael Thurmond, *A Story Untold*, and Jane McPherson, “Judia Jackson Harris,” forthcoming in the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*.

⁷ Judia C. Jackson, “The Upbuilding of a Community” *Southern Workman*, Volume 32, Number 5, 1 May 1903, 200-203. Online at <https://virginiachronicle.com/?a=d&d=SWM19030501.1.10>

⁸ Jackson, “The Upbuilding of a Community,” 200.

parents—Alfred and Louisa Jackson—in the home they built for their growing family at 188 River Street in the neighborhood known as Licksillet.⁹ Both Jackson parents were talented: Louisa was an able seamstress, and Alfred was known for his abundant fruit trees; Louisa sang in the choir, and Alfred played the clarinet.¹⁰ But neither Jackson parent could read or write. Denied access to education during their own enslaved childhoods, they made it a priority to educate their six children. It is a testament to the Jackson parents’ commitment to education that all six of their enumerated children could read and write, and three of their daughters—Camilla Jackson Brydie (1851-1925), Mary Jackson McCrorey (1867-1946), and Judia Jackson Harris—became respected educators.¹¹



Figure 1. The Jackson sisters: Camilla, Mary, and Judia. (Undated images from the Caroline Bond Day papers, courtesy of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/6/archival_objects/1373672.)

Judia, therefore, was unique but not alone. She was one of three pioneering sister-educators, all of whom began their careers in Reconstruction-era Athens—and all of whom were drawn to Athens’s Black educational center: the area we know now as the Reese Street Historic District. In this essay, I will tell the stories of these three sisters—Camilla, Mary, and Judia (see Figure 1)—and then locate them, as well as the two generations of Brydie and Gilbert educators who followed them, as they all hopscotched among the homes on North Finley Street.

⁹ “Alfred Jackson”, 1880 U. S. Census, Clarke County, Georgia.

¹⁰ Judia Jackson Harris, *Forty Years of Experience in a Georgia Community*. (Unpublished memoir, 1954). Cited with permission.

¹¹ For more on Mary Jackson McCrorey, see Jane McPherson, “Mary Jackson McCrorey,” forthcoming in the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*.

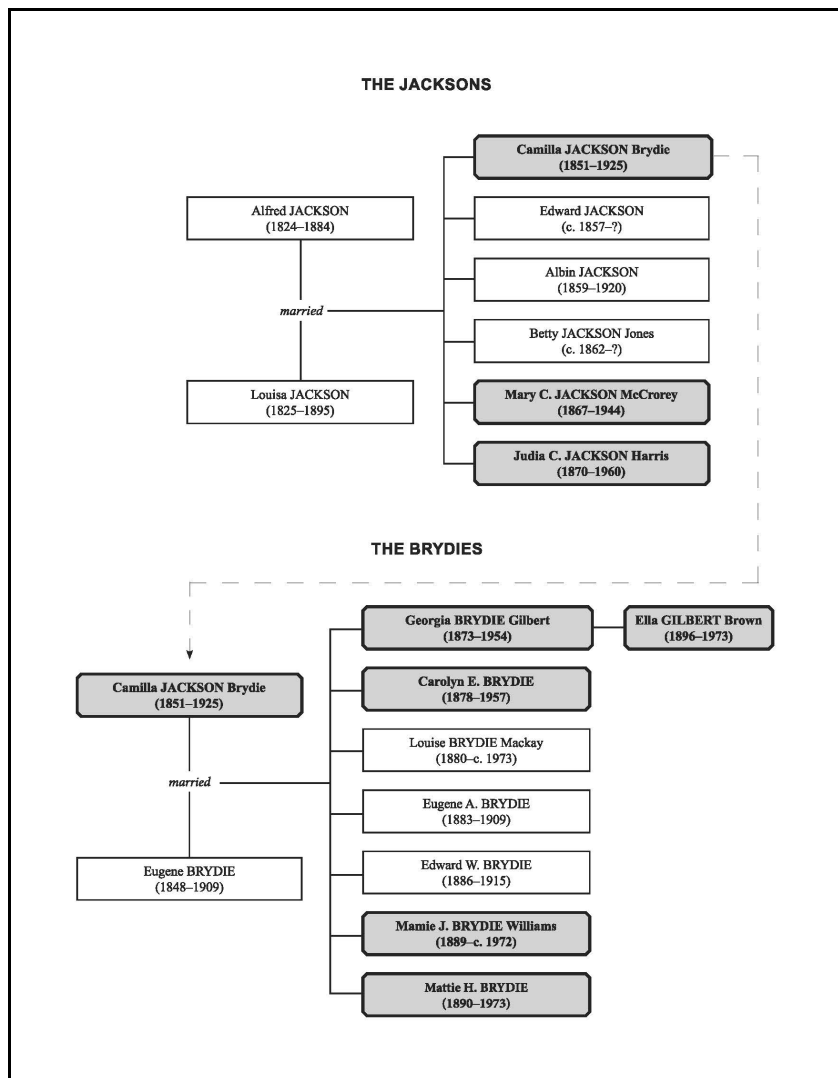


Figure 2. The Jackson and Brydie family tree. Graphic design by Kat Farlowe.

For at least seventy years—beginning by 1886 and ending around 1956, as the last of the Reese Street schools were closing—the Jackson sisters and their educator

descendants lived on North Finley Street and taught in schools nearby (see Figure 2 for a family tree). The house where family members lived at 101 North Finley is gone now, but their homes at 193, 223, and 249 North Finley Street remain. I like to think that they—the houses and the sisters—are ready for their stories to be told. The records are dry—the census, the city directory, wills, and land sales—so a little imagination will help to breathe life into the tale.

The Early Years: The Jackson Sisters in Athens

It makes perfect sense that this family, which so valued education, was drawn to the Reese Street neighborhood. Settled by newly-freed people just after Emancipation, the neighborhood became the home of the Knox School, Athens's first school for Black students, opened by the Freedman's Bureau in 1868. Reese Street quickly became an educational and cultural center, and Camilla, the eldest of the Jackson children, was part of the excitement.¹² Camilla had grown up in slavery in Athens and, though it was illegal to teach an enslaved person to read and write, she acquired the skills of literacy. At just 17 years old, she became an educator at the Knox Institute on the payroll of the Freedman's Bureau, serving from 1868 until 1870.¹³

It is quite remarkable to imagine young Camilla leaving the home she shared with her parents and siblings on River Street and walking the mile and a half through downtown to the newly-opened Freedman's school on Reese Street (perhaps even leading a younger sibling or two in tow?). What a thrilling experience it must have been for this very young woman to hold such a position of prominence during this hopeful time for her community! There is no evidence that Camilla's time as a paid educator extended beyond her few years with the Freedman's Bureau, but the fact that she and her family later moved to the neighborhood may well be evidence of a fondness she developed during those first heady years at Knox Institute.¹⁴ In 1871, Camilla married Eugene W. Brydie, co-proprietor of Sapp & Brydie's Barber Shop, and began another life of caring for

¹² Thurmond, *A Story Untold*.

¹³ Harris, *Forty Years of Experience*. Freedman's Bureau records are available on Ancestry.com.

¹⁴ Judia was recommended for admission to Atlanta University by George V. Clark at Knox Institute. In his letter, he mentions Mary as well as Judia and writes that both are "bright girls." Letter from G. V. Clark to Horace Bumstead (Atlanta University), October 3, 1889. Atlanta University Presidential records. Horace Bumstead records. 0000-0000-0000-0017, Box 21, Folder 12. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library.

family, tutoring her own children, doing laundry, and baking cakes—and perhaps planning her return to the Reese Street neighborhood.¹⁵

As far as we know, Camilla's younger sister Mary was the first Jackson to actually set up house in the Reese Street neighborhood. Mary had been the first Jackson child to be born after Emancipation and, like her sister Camilla, she embraced her calling as an educator as a young girl. In 1880, while living with Camilla and family—and perhaps after some years spent studying at Knox Institute—Mary began several years of teaching in the summertime sessions of Clarke County's rural schoolhouses. By the time she was just 13 or 14 years old, she was managing her own classroom of twenty-four Clarke-County second-graders, and in 1881, she began the teacher training course at Atlanta University. When Athens's new public school system opened in 1886, she put in an application to teach; then, when the teacher qualifying exams were tallied, Mary had made the highest score among all the applicants—both Black and white—scoring higher than one of the daughters of the family which had enslaved her mother and siblings.¹⁶

In 1886, Mary became the first Jackson family member to graduate college as well as the first Black public-school principal in Athens; she led at the short-lived Foundry Street School where she also taught first grade.¹⁷ Adding to her list of firsts, in 1886, Mary became the first member of her family to purchase property in the Reese Street neighborhood. Setting down roots, she bought the lot at the northwest corner of Reese and North Finley Streets, the lot that would become 223 North Finley Street, and soon moved into a nearby house at 101 North Finley Street (presumably because a suitable house at number 223 had not yet been built).¹⁸ Over the next fifteen years or so, the house at 101 North Finley would welcome the extended Jackson-Brydie clan, and it was the only home in the neighborhood that

¹⁵ "Sapp & Brydie's Barber Shop," *The Southern Watchman* (Athens, GA), Dec. 16, 1881, 2. Camilla Jackson Brydie's activities were recorded in the Clarke County, Georgia, censuses of 1880, 1900, and 1920.

¹⁶ W. H. Crogman, "Mary C. Jackson" in *History of the American Negro and His Institutions, Georgia Edition*, A. B. Caldwell, ed. (Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell Publishing Company, 1917), 361. Online <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-bb4f-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

¹⁷ Thurmond, *A Story Untold*, 86.

¹⁸ Mary C. Jackson bought the land at 223 Finley Street from M. B. McGinty on September 13, 1886. The deed was recorded in 1890 in the Clarke County, Georgia, Deed Book HH, page 181, Clarke County Courthouse, Athens. Date verified by a 1945 letter in Shackelford & Shackelford records, ms1365, Box 2, Folder 26, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

housed all three Jackson sisters.¹⁹ Unfortunately, this house does not survive; it was likely demolished when Broad Street was widened in 1938.²⁰

When Camilla and Eugene moved into the house at 101 North Finley Street with their children in the mid- to late-1890s, Mary had already been lured away from Athens to Augusta, Georgia, to become the associate principal at Haines Institute, where she worked for 20 years alongside Lucy Craft Laney and helped to grow that school into the powerhouse it became.²¹ It is not known why Camilla and Eugene Brydie chose this moment to move to North Finley Street. Perhaps they had an opportunity to occupy Mary's newly vacated space or perhaps they wanted their children to grow up in a community that was developing a reputation as an educational center? Whatever their reasons, when they moved to North Finley Street, several of their seven children were still at home and were likely in school, perhaps at the public West Athens School, about a mile away on Broad Street, or maybe even at the Knox Institute, a private school, right around the corner. It's easy to imagine the morning caravan from the neighborhood to both schools, as teachers and students made their commutes.

Though Mary was gone from Athens, Camilla's other teacher sister, Judia, took up residence with the Brydie family at 101 North Finley.²² Like her sister Mary before her, Judia had begun her teaching career in rural Clarke County Schools as a young teenager, and then in 1889, when she was just nineteen years of age, she became a full-time teacher at Athens's Baxter Street School; also, like Mary, Judia completed the teacher-training course at Atlanta University, graduating in the Class of 1894. Returning to Athens, she continued teaching at both the East Athens and West Broad schools, covering first, second, fifth, and sixth grades until she was promoted to Principal of the East Athens School in 1902.²³ In 1901, during this same period while she was teaching in Athens and living with Camilla and family, Judia began her work with the farming families of rural Clarke County, the work she called "the movement out near Helicon Springs for the betterment of my

¹⁹ In 1889, the first *Athens City Directory* was published. Mary Jackson is the only resident listed at 101 North Finley, though it is possible that her widowed mother or another family member may have been living there with her. There are no residences listed at either 193 or 223 North Finley.

²⁰ Andrews, "Reese Street's Last Stand."

²¹ Audrey Thomas McCluskey, *A Forgotten Sisterhood: Pioneering Black Women Educators and Activists in the Jim Crow South*.

²² Eugene W. Brydie and Judia Jackson are both listed at 101 North Finley in the 1897-98 *Athens City Directory*. https://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/data/dlg/acd/pdfs/dlg_acd_acd1897-98.pdf

²³ Minutes and Annual Reports (1886-1948), Clarke County Board of Education papers, ms3179, box 6, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

people.”²⁴ As Judia wrote in her 1903 resignation letter to Athens City Schools, her intention was to open a Model and Training School “to help improve the home life of the individual, to teach the boys and girls who hitherto had few educational advantages and to help the rural teacher who has the real problem to deal with.” She determined to give the work the “active service” and “self-sacrifice [that] must be given to change these conditions.”²⁵ Over the next few years, Judia took up permanent residence on the Danielsville Road near her Model and Training School, but she was never far from the Reese Street neighborhood where her beloved sister and nieces lived (and later taught) and where her future husband, Samuel F. Harris, would shortly build his own school.

At the close of the nineteenth century, five past, current, and/or future Jackson and Brydie family teachers were living together in the house at 101 North Finley, including the Jackson sisters—Camilla and Judia—and three of Camilla’s daughters, Carolyn, Mamie and Mattie Brydie. Judia would have been waking early to travel to her classroom, likely bringing her young nieces with her when she was teaching at West Broad. Carolyn was often away during these years studying at Atlanta University, but she would have been home on breaks to help with the work of the household.

Carolyn Brydie (1878-1957) was the last in the family to launch her teaching career from 101 North Finley Street. In 1899, Carolyn became the first family member to graduate with a B.A. degree, and after graduation, she returned home to teach 5th grade in Athens.²⁶ During the opening years of the new century, Carolyn spent time learning from—and with—her teacher aunts Mary and Judia. In 1901, she worked under the supervision of her Aunt Mary at Haines Institute’s Peabody Summer Institute for teachers in Augusta; then, in 1904, the three Atlanta University grads—Mary Jackson, Judia Jackson, and Carolyn Brydie—spent the summer together studying at Harvard University in Massachusetts.²⁷ Carolyn

²⁴ Judia Jackson provided a “101 North Finley Street” return address in a letter to Rev. M. W. Adams, president of Atlanta University, April 8, 1903. Atlanta University Presidential records. Horace Bumstead records. 0000-0000-0000-0017, Box 21, Folder 1. Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library.

²⁵ Judia Jackson, resignation letter to Athens City Schools, July 7, 1903. Cameron Douglas Flanigen papers, ms3, Box 1, Folder 5. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

²⁶ Carolyn Brydie taught briefly in the Athens schools. She is listed as teaching 5th grade in September 1899. 1899 Minute Book, Clarke County Board of Education papers, ms3179, box 21, 261. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

²⁷ “Peabody Institute Opened Yesterday at Lucy Laney School,” *The Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA), June 18, 1901, 8.

followed in her aunts’ footsteps and then journeyed beyond them, earning a second undergraduate degree from the University of Chicago in 1908.²⁸

When Carolyn set out for Chicago, her younger sister Louise was already in residence in the city, having trained there as a nurse and chosen to stay. Carolyn and Louise were not the first or only members of their larger family to seek opportunity beyond Athens. Of the six Jackson siblings, only Camilla and Judia—the eldest and the youngest—remained in Athens after Reconstruction was replaced by Jim Crow: Mary was in Augusta, and the other three—Edward, Albin, and Betty—had moved further south to Florida. Eugene’s daughter, Mamie Brydie Williams (another Atlanta University graduate) left for Washington, DC. Though Carolyn moved permanently away from Athens, she remained connected to North Finley Street through her family ties and by her own upcoming land purchases.

The Public School comes to Reese Street

Back in Athens in 1909, the Brydie clan had become Mary Jackson’s tenants in the house now built at 223 North Finley (see Figure 3). Camilla and Eugene’s daughter Mamie Brydie was busy following in Carolyn’s footsteps at Atlanta University studying for her B.A.; their youngest child, Mattie, was in school; and Camilla and Eugene’s eldest child, Georgia Brydie Gilbert (1873-1954), who also began her working life as a teacher in the 1890s in Clarke County, had returned to Athens from North Carolina with her two young children to take up residence with her parents.²⁹ At 223 North Finley, they were a three-generational household comprising a barber, a baker, an insurance agent, a teacher, and several students.

These were busy years for the Jackson and Brydie families and for the Reese Street neighborhood. In 1912, Mamie graduated from Atlanta University and—in what was certainly a union of Black Athens’s educational titans—Judia married Samuel F. Harris, an event that received notice in the local white-owned newspaper:

Professor Samuel F. Harris, principal of the colored high school for colored students in Athens, is to be married...to Judia C. Jackson, the

²⁸ University of Chicago Convocation Program, August 28, 1908. Courtesy of University of Chicago Libraries. <https://campub.lib.uchicago.edu/view/?docId=mvol-0447-1908-0828#page/4/>.

²⁹ Clarke County Board of Education papers, ms3179, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

principal of one of the finest industrial schools in the state for colored youth—located in this county.³⁰



Figure 3. The house at 223 North Finley sits on the northwest corner of Reese and Finley Streets, on the first tract of neighborhood land purchased by a Jackson-Brydie family. (1967 photo [left] Athens Heritage Foundation House Survey [Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library]; 2024 photo [right] Jane McPherson)

I expect these events were celebrated at 223 North Finley. Perhaps these celebrations were even the occasion for Carolyn Brydie to make the trip to Athens from Kansas City, where she was teaching Latin and drama? And were these possibly the events that got Carolyn thinking about making a real estate purchase? Whatever her reasons, in 1912, Carolyn entered into a contract to buy the house at 193 North Finley Street (see Figure 4), just across Reese Street from the house belonging to her Aunt Mary, where her family was in residence.

Many changes in the neighborhood (and the family) were underway: Camilla Brydie, now widowed, moved her three-generation family for a final time across Reese Street to the house owned by her daughter Carolyn at 193 North Finley. Camilla's Athens-based teacher-daughters—Georgia, Mamie and Mattie, plus Georgia's daughter, Ella Gilbert, moved across Reese Street along with their mother and grandmother.³¹ Ella who had finished school in 1913, studying the “classical course” under Samuel Harris—her great-uncle by marriage—was on the verge of becoming a teacher herself.³²

³⁰ “Well Known Colored Teacher to Marry,” *The Banner-Herald* (Athens, GA), June 20, 1912, 4.

³¹ *Athens City Directory*, 1914-15.

³² Athens City Schools Annual Report for 1913. Clarke County Board of Education papers, ms3179, box 6. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

More consequentially, under Samuel Harris's supervision, the Athens Board of Education opened a new two-story frame school at the northeast corner of Reese and Church Streets in 1914. The Reese Street School (see Figure 5), as it was originally known, extended public education for Black students from first through tenth grades, and Camilla's daughters—Mamie and Mattie Brydie—were early members of that school's faculty, teaching seventh and fourth grades, respectively.³³ As the school evolved into the Athens High and Industrial School, Mamie held the prestigious position of science teacher and Mattie was part of the “teaching corps.”³⁴



Figure 4. The house at 193 North Finley sits on the southwest corner of Reese and Finley Streets. This land was purchased by Carolyn Brydie in 1912. (1967 photo [left] Athens Heritage Foundation House Survey [Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library]; 2024 photo [right] Jane McPherson)

I can imagine Aunt Judia sitting at the kitchen table in the new house at 193 North Finley, sharing teaching strategies with her nieces Mamie and Mattie Brydie, and perhaps trading family gossip with her sister Camilla. Samuel Harris famously worked a double shift at the high school, managing regular classes during the day and supervising adult learning at night, so I expect Judia would walk up Reese Street and visit him as well, perhaps with a picnic or some baked goods in her purse.³⁵

The opening of the Reese Street School only added to the shine of the Reese Street neighborhood. The neighborhood had been a Black educational and cultural

³³ Minutes and Annual Reports, Clarke County Board of Education papers, ms3179, box 6. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

³⁴ “Teachers Elected,” *The Banner-Herald* (Athens, GA), May 28, 1914, 5; 1914-15 *Athens City Directory*.

³⁵ Harris, *Forty Years of Experience in a Georgia Community*.

center since the Knox School (later, Knox Institute) opened in the early years of Reconstruction, but with the opening of Reese Street School, the neighborhood was home to both public and private institutions, drawing even more Black educators, professionals, and families who were ambitious for their children.

Everyone must have celebrated in 1922, when Athens High and Industrial became the very first four-year Black public high school to be accredited in Georgia.³⁶ As one scholar writes, “Black Athenians viewed education as valuable capital, which served to benefit the community as a whole...[part of their] relentless struggle to resist White supremacy, anti-Black racism, and exclusion from predominantly White institutions.”³⁷ The relationship went both ways: the community supported the schools, and the schools helped build the community.



Figure 5. Alone among the historic schools of Reese Street, the Reese Street School still stands. These images show the school in 1915 (left) and in 2024 (right). (The 1915 image is from the Jackson Davis Collection of African American Educational Photographs, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library. 2024 photo by the author.)

The Brydie family at 193 North Finley Street was part and parcel of this community experience, full participants in the growth and change of the neighborhood, while absorbing the changes brought by marriage, death, and migration in their own family dynamics and structures. In 1917, Mamie left Athens and her position at Athens High and Industrial to marry Sidney Williams, a fellow educator and Atlanta University graduate.³⁸ Coincidentally, Mamie and her aunt Mary both left Georgia in 1916-1917 to marry men who would become North

³⁶ Amber M. Neal-Stanley, “For the Good of the Whole: Restor(y)ing the History of Georgia’s First Black Public High School” in *Black Cultural Capital: Activism That Spurred African American High Schools*, Vanessa Garry, E. Paulette Isaac-Savage, and Sha-Lai L. Williams, eds. (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2023), 223-246.

³⁷ Neal-Stanley, “For the Good of the Whole,” 223.

³⁸ Sidney David Williams graduated from Atlanta University with a B.A. in the class of 1914. (*AU Bulletin*, 1914.)

Carolina university presidents—and both Mamie and Mary retained their careers as educators after marriage. Ella Gilbert, stepping into her role as an anchor of the family on North Finley Street, began her 40-year career with Athens Public Schools in 1920, teaching sixth grade at Athens High and Industrial, while her aunt Mattie began teaching at the West Broad School.

Camilla Brydie, her daughters Georgia and Mattie, and Georgia’s daughter, Ella, were all still living together at 193 North Finley in 1925 when Camilla died unexpectedly while “engaged in her daily duties at home.” Camilla’s death was announced in the local (white-owned) newspaper under the headline, “One of Athens’ Most Respected Negroes Dies,” but, of course, it was her family who mourned her most deeply.³⁹ The eldest of six siblings, Camilla had been a mother figure to Mary, Judia, and the others; as Judia wrote, “She was so lovely and motherly in her disposition, that we, her sisters and brothers, always regarded her as her own children did.”⁴⁰ The death of the beloved family matriarch may well have brought the family together at 193 North Finley, perhaps for the last time. Judia signed Camilla’s death certificate, so we know that she was there, but sister Mary would surely have come down from Charlotte, North Carolina, as well. Camilla’s surviving children—all daughters—must have been there, also: Georgia and Mattie, based in Athens; Carolyn from Kansas City; Louise from Chicago; and Mamie from North Carolina. Though Camilla and Eugene Brydie had seven children, Camilla had only three grandchildren living at the time of her death, Georgia’s children, Ella and Robert, and Louise’s daughter, Virgil.

Camilla’s death brought more changes. Mattie left Athens to make her home in the North. Ambition, education, and the Great Migration are all themes in the lives of Jackson and Brydie family members, as they were in the families of many of their friends and neighbors.⁴¹ When Mattie made the decision to go North, she joined relatives in Chicago, New York, Kansas City, and Washington, DC, all of whom—as she did—left home in search of greater opportunity. After Mattie’s departure, Judia Jackson Harris, Georgia Brydie Gilbert, and Ella Gilbert Brown were the only immediate Jackson and Brydie family members left in the Athens area, and Ella was the only educator left on North Finley Street.

And Ella’s career was taking off. When Knox Institute closed in 1928, Samuel Harris moved his thriving high school into that historic school’s empty campus on the other side of Reese Street, leaving the old Reese Street School to open as a

³⁹ “One of Athens’ Most Respected Negroes Dies.” *The Banner-Herald* (Athens, GA), Nov. 18, 1925, 8.

⁴⁰ Harris, *Forty Years of Experience in a Georgia Community*, 86.

⁴¹ See Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (New York: Vintage, 2011).

“grammar school,” serving students from first through seventh grades.⁴² Ella became the senior teacher at the newly-restructured school, assigned to seventh grade, and she soon became the Principal of the Reese Street School.⁴³

At the same time, even as their presence in the Reese Street neighborhood was shrinking, the family’s landholdings were increasing. Mary Jackson McCrorey and Carolyn Brydie still owned their houses at 193 and 223 North Finley, plus Carolyn owned land directly across the street from 193 North Finley (part of the land now occupied by The Rambler student apartment complex); and in 1929, Georgia bought the house at 249 North Finley Street, and she and her daughter Ella vacated the house in which they had lived with Camilla and moved up the street towards West Hancock (see Figure 6).⁴⁴



Figure 6. The house at 249 North Finley Street was purchased by Georgia Brydie Gilbert in 1929. (1967 photo [left] Athens Heritage Foundation House Survey [Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library]; 2024 photo [right] Jane McPherson)

The house at 193 North Finley had a curious second act after the Brydies moved out. In the spring of 1928, the American Missionary Association announced that the Knox Institute would be closed unless \$5,000 could be raised locally.⁴⁵ It seems that Carolyn Brydie may have tried to support the school where her mother had taught after Emancipation by offering the use of the family’s North Finley Street home. That fall, after Knox was forced to move out of its Reese Street campus, *The Banner-Herald* reported the opening of the school’s new location at “the home formerly occupied by the Brydie family, corner Reese and Finley

⁴² Andrews, “Reese Street’s Last Stand,” 34.

⁴³ “Plans Underway for Opening of Colored Schools,” *The Banner-Herald* (Athens, GA), Sept. 2, 1928, 6.

⁴⁴ Clarke County, Georgia, Deed Book 53, page 320, Athens-Clarke County Courthouse, Athens, GA.

⁴⁵ “Knox Institute makes Appeal for Funds,” *The Banner-Herald* (Athens, GA), Mar. 11, 1928, 9.

Streets.”⁴⁶ No further mention of Knox Institute at 193 North Finley has been located, but the “Little Knox School” does seem to have found a home there. Little Knox is listed in the 1937 and 1938 city directories, and Callie Elder, a formerly enslaved person, got up from her 1938 Federal Works Project interview to usher her grandson off to “Little Knox.” Also, Fannie Jordan, who was born in 1922, told an interviewer, “I went to private school first. It was called ‘Little Knox.’”⁴⁷ It was on Finley and Reese Street.⁴⁸

During the 1930s, 1940s, and well into the 1950s, the Reese Street neighborhood thrived. The Athens High and Industrial School and the Reese Street School continued to be magnetic forces that drew people to the neighborhood, and the schools were in turn supported by the “distinctive communal ethos and practice” of the Black Athens community.⁴⁹ Historic preservationist Amelia Andrews writes, “Reese Street was shaped from within by its educated, goal-oriented and influential residents.”⁵⁰

Ella Gilbert Brown rode this wave of community support while serving as the principal of Reese Street School. Students recall Brown as a “very, very strict” principal who “didn’t take any foolishness,” but apparently, she was also capable of whimsy.⁵¹ Odella Thompson, a student at Reese Street in the 1950s, remembers Principal Brown for “get[ting] us a sliding board and it was a pretty high sliding board and we were all so excited to be able to walk up that high ladder and slide down—swoop down—that sliding board. Everyone loved it!”⁵²

⁴⁶ “Knox Institute Opens Wednesday at New Location,” *The Banner-Herald* (Athens, GA), Sept. 4, 1928, 8; “Knox Institute Invites Public to School Today,” *The Banner-Herald* (Athens, GA), Sept. 9, 1928, 4.

⁴⁷ *Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project*, Vol. 4, Georgia, Part 1, Adams-Furr. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/mesn041/>.

⁴⁸ “Interview with Fannie Jordan, July 12, 2013.” *First Person Project*. Renee Donnell and Laura Dovecot, interviewers. RBRL324FPP-0015. University of Georgia Oral History Collections.

⁴⁹ Neal-Stanley, “For the good of the whole,” 223.

⁵⁰ Andrews, “Reese Street’s Last Stand,” 110.

⁵¹ Former Reese Street students quoted in Monica Dellenberger Knight, “Seeking Education for Liberation: The Development of Black Schools in Athens, Georgia from Emancipation through Desegregation,” Dissertation (University of Georgia, 2007), 160.

⁵² “Odella Thompson interviewed by William Breeding, June 15, 2023.” Athens Oral History Project, Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia Libraries. <https://russelllibraryoralhistory.org/RBRL361AOHP/rb1361aohp-113>.

The Schools Close and the Family Moves On

On a cold night in January 1944, a tragic housefire on the campus of Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, killed Mary Jackson McCrorey. Mary, then seventy-seven years old, had been ill and was trapped when flames rapidly engulfed the university president's house, her home for almost 30 years. Expressing the grief that must have been shared by her entire family, Mary's niece Carolyn Brydie wrote to Mary's widower, Dr. Henry Lawrence McCrorey, "Her [Mary's] death has been one of the great shocks from which I shall never recover...I cannot get it through my head that a large brick residence...could burn so suddenly and completely."⁵³

Mary's death also began the unraveling of the family's tight land-holding connection to North Finley Street and the Reese Street neighborhood. Mary left the house at 223 North Finley to her sister Judia, and Judia sold it that same year. Judia had her own house on the Danielsville Road, and the Reese Street neighborhood may have evoked in her painful memories of loss: the death of her cherished sister Camilla in 1925; the death of her husband Samuel F. Harris in 1935; and now the horrific loss of her sister Mary.

Still, Georgia Brydie Gilbert and her daughter, Ella, remained in their house at 249 North Finley. The neighborhood schools continued to draw children and families, and Ella was solidly at the helm of the Reese Street School until the Athens School Board closed it after 1955. Multiple forces converged to relocate Athens High and Industrial outside the Reese Street neighborhood and to close the Reese Street School after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, including pressures towards racial "equalization" and desegregation, as well as the consolidation of Athens City and Clarke County Schools into a unified system.⁵⁴ These same forces closed the Judia C. Jackson Harris School [the old Model and Training School] on Danielsville Road in 1956. The closure of the schools was a huge blow to these communities. As Michael Thurmond wrote, when "schools in traditionally black neighborhoods were phased out...traditionally African American neighborhoods lost their community focus."⁵⁵ Reese Street also lost its community members, including the last of the Jackson-Brydie clan.

In 1956, Ella traveled from Athens to Kansas City, Missouri, where she acted as witness to the legalities of Carolyn Brydie's sale of her North Finley Street

⁵³ Letter from Carolyn Brydie to Dr Henry L. McCrorey, January 30, 1944, President H. L. McCrorey Collection, RG-5, Johnson C. Smith University Library.

⁵⁴ Andrews, "Reese Street's Last Stand;" Knight, "Seeking Education for Liberation;" Thurmond, *A Story Untold*.

⁵⁵ Thurmond, *A Story Untold*, 93.

properties.⁵⁶ That same year, Georgia Brydie Gilbert died, leaving the home at 249 North Finley to Ella, who quickly sold it and moved to a home she purchased on West Hancock Avenue.⁵⁷ By the end of 1956, the family had relinquished its hold on North Finley Street and the Reese Street schools had relocated or closed. When ninety-year old Judia Jackson Harris died a few years later in 1960, Ella Gilbert Brown was the only one of her nine surviving nieces, grandnieces, and grandnephews who remained in Athens.⁵⁸



It is easy to imagine a different history for the Reese Street schools—one in which the white school board maintained and expanded these excellent schools in a Black neighborhood, investing in them to develop new programs and resources. We can imagine Ella finishing out her career as Principal at Reese Street School, rather than having to take on the principalship of the newly opened North Athens School at the very end of her career. We can imagine more and more Black families being drawn to the Reese Street neighborhood and then celebrating as their children graduated and headed to college or developed new businesses in Athens. We can imagine Reese Street as a thriving community of Black homeowners—educators, professionals, and ambitious citizens—as it was 100 years ago.

But this alternate world can only be imagined because this is not what happened. Now, only six owner-occupants remain in the neighborhood, and students from the nearby University of Georgia vastly outnumber the members of families who have lived on and around Reese Street for generations.⁵⁹

It is fortunate—and there is some hope at the end of this hard story—that the Reese Street Historic District will continue to protect the built environment of the historic Reese Street neighborhood, and that among those protected properties are the three Jackson and Brydie homes on North Finley Street and the still-gorgeous Reese Street School building, now home to the Athens Masonic Association (see Figure 7 for a map of the family's homes and schools). I am grateful that the City of Athens has protected these buildings, but I believe we must also find a way to preserve and promote the stories of the people these buildings once held.

⁵⁶ Clarke County, Georgia, Deed Book 160, 508. Athens-Clarke County Courthouse, Athens, GA.

⁵⁷ Clarke County, Georgia, Deed Book 160, 420-421. Athens-Clarke County Courthouse, Athens, GA.

⁵⁸ "Funeral Notice (Colored). Harris, Mrs. Judia C. Jackson," *The Banner-Herald* (Athens, GA), Mar. 18, 1960, 2.

⁵⁹ Andrews, *Reese Street's Last Stand*, 71.

This essay is an offering in the direction of collective memory; it is an invitation and a challenge. Our community must find a way to recover, remember, and repeat the stories of the many educators and professionals who left their marks on the Reese Street community and on Athens. This paper tells the story of just one family; and there are many more.

As you are pondering how we might make these stories more visible in the built environment, please take a journey over to Reese and North Finley Streets, and as you visit, please remember the remarkable Jackson and Brydie family educators who once lived and worked there: the three Jackson sisters, Camilla Jackson Brydie, Mary Jackson McCrorey, and Judia Jackson Harris; Camilla's daughters, Georgia Brydie Gilbert, Carolyn Brydie, Mamie Brydie Williams, and Mattie Brydie; and Georgia's daughter, Ella Gilbert Brown. And think, too, of the many, many young people—the thousands of students—whose learning and lives were shaped by this remarkable family of teachers who once anchored this two-block concentration of aspiration, education, and attainment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many librarians, historians, and individuals have helped me understand the lives of Judia Jackson Harris and her family. For this paper, I am particularly indebted to Amy Andrews, Bryant Barnes, Beth and Steven Brown, Gwen Russell Calderon, Maggie Carr, Alan Colón, Janine Duncan, Alana Harris (Paine College), Jon Jefferson, Joyce Law, and Mary Linnemann (Hargrett Library, University of Georgia), Brandon Lunsford (Johnson C. Smith University), Dr. Alisa Luxenberg, Eve B. Mayes, Dr. Barbara McCaskill, Jill Severn (Russell Library, University of Georgia), Fred Smith, Sr., Kat Stein (Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia), Michael Thurmond, Rebekah Wade, and Marie Wasnock (Peabody Museum, Harvard University).

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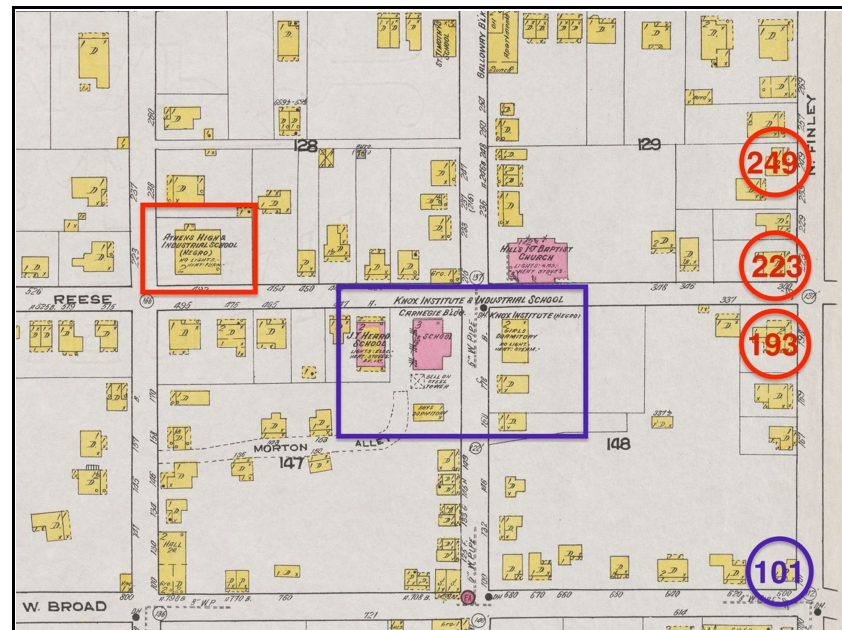


Figure 7. This edited selection from 1918 Sanborn Fire map indicates the Jackson-Brydie family homes at 101, 193, 223, and 249 North Finley, as well as the educational institutions that anchored the Reese Street neighborhood—the Knox Institute, Athens High and Industrial School, and the Reese Street School. In 1928, Athens High and Industrial School moved into the Knox Institute campus and the Reese Street School took up residence in the building marked here as the Athens High and Industrial School. Existing buildings are indicated in red; absent buildings are outlined in blue.

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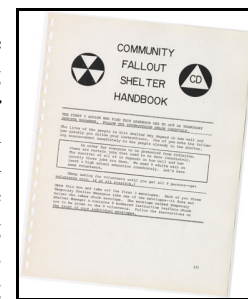
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Protecting the Community? Fallout Shelter Occupancy Studies at the University of Georgia, 1962-1968

By Cal P. Bedenbaugh

"Follow these instructions carefully. The lives of the people in this shelter depend on you." These, the opening words of the *Community Fallout Shelter Handbook for Untrained Management*, were written to the first person who, in the event of a nuclear attack, would find a marked copy of the book in public fallout shelters across the United States. Created by a team of researchers working for the University of Georgia (UGA), the *Handbook* runs over one hundred and forty-eight pages, giving step-by-step instructions to those who first volunteered and then were permanently chosen to lead the day-to-day operations of large, public fallout shelters.⁶⁰ These operations included, but were not limited to, radiation tracking, public safety, communications with the outside world, sanitation, and soothing the fears of citizens; the *Handbook* tasked prospective managers with protecting their communities in the event of a nuclear holocaust. Athens and the University of Georgia provided the impetus for and played a central role in producing the *Handbook* and national policy on civil defense through the document's nation-wide use.

From 1961 until 1968, the University of Georgia conducted research for the Office of Civil Defense under the direction of John A. Hammes and the Civil Defense Research Division on the occupancy of fallout shelters. This research first focused on the minimum survivability of fallout shelters to uncover the number of materials needed to be stocked in any given shelter. In 1964, the research quickly turned to shelter management. Phase II of the Shelter Occupancy Studies was tasked with the



The handbook developed by the UGA Civil Defense Research Division in 1962.

⁶⁰ John A. Hammes and Thomas R. Ahearn, *Community Fallout Shelter Handbook for Untrained Management*. From now on, I will refer to the *Community Fallout Shelter Handbook for Untrained Management* as either the *Handbook*, or as it was referred to amongst the UGA Civil Defense researchers, the *Golden Book*.