

Ruby A. Edwards (1906-1977)

Ruby A. Jackson was born on January 29, 1906 in Bloomington, Illinois.¹ She was the daughter of Andrew Jackson and Elizabeth (Wilson) Jackson. Not much is known about Ruby's early life. Her family lived at 1104 W. Olive Street for a time and her father's occupation was a "shiner," (presumably a shoe shiner) and he worked for J.H. Mantle, a barber in the basement of the Livingston building.² Ruby and her family moved to Chicago,³ where she attended Chicago Public Schools and later Woodrow Wilson Junior College in Chicago.⁴

Ruby married her first husband, Frank E. Hogan Sr., on September 3, 1922 in Cook County, IL.⁵ They had one son, Frank Hogan Jr. who was born on September 28, 1922.⁶ According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Ruby and her family lived at 441 Oakwood Blvd. in Chicago and her husband Frank Sr. was employed as a waiter for the steam railroad.⁷ By 1940, Ruby and her family were living on E. 36th Street in Chicago. Their son Frank Jr., his wife Lorraine (whom he married in 1939)⁸ and their eleven month old daughter Alama (Alaine) were also living with them.⁹ Frank Jr. and Lorraine had a second daughter, Phyllis Jean, who was born on January 2, 1942¹⁰ but died tragically on August 16, 1948 after falling from a diving platform and drowning at Miller Park.

Phyllis, her sister Alaine, and a friend Linda Tutor, went to Miller Park to swim in the unattended "colored" section of the beach. Phyllis and Alaine were living with Ruby and Booker in Bloomington at the time of the incident. According to *The Pantagraph* article about the incident, on Mondays, the "colored" beach is not attended by a life guard. An eyewitness stated that he saw Phyllis walk out to the end of the platform and fall into the water. Two men, one of whom was the life guard at the white beach, found Phyllis and pulled her from the water. They were unable to save her life as she had been underwater for too long. Because of this incident, it was recommended by the coroner's jury that the "colored" beach be fenced in with "a six foot high fence extending from the north side of the bath house north for 50 feet and from the south side of the bath house extending west 50 feet." It was further recommended that a gate be placed "in the south partition of the fence and that the fence should extend into the water" and when "a lifeguard is not on duty the gate should be kept locked."¹¹ Phyllis was only six years old at the time and was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.¹²

¹ U.S. Social Security Death Index for Ruby Edwards, www.ancestry.com, date downloaded August 9, 2013

² *1907 Bloomington-Normal City Directory October 1, 1907* (Bloomington: Pantagraph Printing and Stationary Co.), 270

³ "Ruby Edwards, 71, civic leader, dies," *The Pantagraph*, December 31, 1977

⁴ Woodrow Wilson Junior College was founded in 1934 and was renamed Kennedy-King College in 1969; "Colleges of Chicago, Kennedy-King <http://www.ccc.edu/colleges/kennedy/menu/Pages/History.aspx>

⁵ Cook County Marriage Index, Years 1914-1942, #0936256, p. 4579, www.ancestry.com, date accessed August 12, 2013

⁶ "Bloomington-Normal Deaths, Frank E. Hogan," *The Pantagraph*, October 18, 1970

⁷ 1930 U.S. Federal Census, www.ancestry.com, date accessed August 12, 2013

⁸ "Bloomington-Normal Deaths, Frank E. Hogan."

⁹ 1940 U.S. Federal Census, www.ancestry.com, date accessed August 12, 2013

¹⁰ "Child drowns at Miller Park," *The Pantagraph*, August 17, 1948

¹¹ "Child drowns at Miller Park;" Personal correspondence between Aingeal Stone and Barbara Feist concerning children of Frank Hogan Jr. and Lorraine Hogan, July 26, 2013;

¹² Burial record for Phyllis Jean Hogan, *Illinois McLean County Cemeteries, v. 19, Bloomington Township, Evergreen memorial Cemetery* (Normal, Ill.: McLean County Genealogical Society, 2001), 213.

Sometime between 1940 and 1942, Ruby and her family moved back to Bloomington. It was also around this time that Ruby's marriage to Frank Sr. ended. It is not known what led to the dissolution of their marriage.

There is no mention of Ruby in local records again until the 1941 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*¹³ where she was listed as residing at 1104 W. Olive Street. On December 14, 1942 Ruby married Booker T. Meaderds in St. Louis, Missouri.¹⁴ Meaderds was born on January 21, 1904 and was the son of Boone V. and Ora M. Meaderds.¹⁵ Booker was a dry cleaner by trade and worked for several dry cleaners in Bloomington including: Peerless Cleaners (two locations in Bloomington: 718 W. Walnut and 107 W. Front) in 1941 and 1949 and Soft Water Laundry and Dry Cleaners in 1943.¹⁶ Coincidentally, they lived at the same address where her parents had resided in the 1907.¹⁷ Around 1950 Ruby and Booker moved to 301 S. Western Avenue.¹⁸ Sadly, after only nine years of marriage, Booker passed away on September 15, 1953 after an illness of seven months.¹⁹ They had no children together. Ruby continued to live there until she married her third husband in 1954.

Ruby worked a variety of menial labor jobs throughout much of her adult life. She was a waitress at the Tilden Hall Hotel which was located at the northeast corner of Madison and Washington Streets.²⁰ Next, she was a janitress at W.H. Roland's Department Store (located at 115 W. Jefferson Street and today the current location of Heritage Enterprises) where she worked from about 1949 until about 1957.²¹ She was employed by the state at Lincoln State School and served as housemother at the Morgan Washington Home. This was a home for dependent children who were neglected or had no one to care for them. In 1971 she worked at Bloomington High School as a food service worker until her retirement in 1972.²²

From about 1957 until 1969 she worked for Hazle Buck Ewing with her third husband Herman Edwards. Ruby and Herman (who was a widower) married on June 15, 1954 in Bloomington.²³ Herman was born on December 1, 1895 in Leesburg, Florida. He was the son of George and Sarah (Wallace) Edwards.²⁴

Ruby served as cook and Herman as a chauffeur and a houseman for Mrs. Ewing. Ruby gained this position after she and Herman married. Herman and his first wife Lydia worked for Mrs. Ewing starting about 1951.²⁵ From all accounts, Ruby's time spent working for the Ewing family was one she enjoyed and took pride in. She loved living and working at Ewing Manor.²⁶ During most of their time working for Mrs. Ewing, Ruby and Herman lived in an apartment above the garage at the estate located at 46 Sunset Road.²⁷ As cook, Ruby and Mrs. Ewing

¹³ *Polk's Bloomington City Directory 1941 including Normal*, (St. Louis: R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers)

¹⁴ "Bloomington-Normal Deaths, Booker T. Meaderds," *The Pantagraph*, September 16, 1953

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ *Polk's Bloomington City Directory 1941, 1943, and 1949 including Normal*, (St. Louis: R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers)

¹⁷ *1907 Bloomington Normal City Directory*

¹⁸ *Polk's Bloomington City Directory 1951 including Normal*, (St. Louis: R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers), 89

¹⁹ "Bloomington-Normal Deaths: Booker T. Meaderds."

²⁰ *Polk's Bloomington City Directory 1946 including Normal*, (St. Louis: R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers)

²¹ *Polk's Bloomington City Directory 1949, 1953, 1955-56 including Normal*, (St. Louis: R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers)

²² *Polk's Bloomington-Normal City Directory 1972*, (St. Louis: R.L. Polk & Co. Publishers)

²³ "Bloomington-Normal Deaths, Herman Edwards," *The Pantagraph*, October 31, 1967

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ Email correspondence from Ted Ewing, May 20, 2013; *Polk's Bloomington City Directory 1951*, 89

²⁶ Candace Summers and Judy Brown oral history interview with Cindy Ewing, May 31, 2013, transcript

²⁷ *Ibid*

planned the meals which Ruby would prepare and serve. Cindy Ewing, who was a granddaughter of Hazle Buck Ewing, recalled that the food Ruby prepared was “not fancy, but well prepared,” typical Midwestern fare of meat, potatoes, and “overcooked vegetables.” White bread was baked every week using Mrs. Ewing’s recipes.²⁸ Cindy also recalled that Ruby was easy going and “feisty in a way, you could kid around with her.” Cindy said she was great to have conversations with but you would not have wanted to have been on the wrong side of Ruby because “she could probably dress you down pretty well if needed.”²⁹

Sadly, Ruby suffered yet another loss in her life. Herman passed away on October 26, 1967 at Brokaw Hospital.³⁰ Cindy Ewing remembered that Ruby and Herman “were a great pair,” they complemented each other well.³¹ Herman was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. Ruby never married again.

Ruby continued to work for Mrs. Ewing after Herman’s death. She remained at the home until the estate was settled and the house turned over to the Illinois State University Foundation following Mrs. Ewing’s death in August of 1969. Mrs. Ewing donated the Manor (today known as Ewing Cultural Center and home of the Illinois Shakespeare Festival) to the University.

“Onward and Upward, Thus Lifting as we Climb, with Loyalty to Women and Justice to Children;”³² that was the motto of one of the organizations to which Ruby belonged and one which sums her life up accurately. Throughout her working life, no matter what job she was doing, Ruby was heavily involved in service clubs and community organizations. She belonged to at least 20 different clubs and organizations and most of these groups dealt with improving social conditions for African Americans, women, and children, all of which appeared to be very important to her. She was very concerned about what was going on in the world around her.³³ She was often the founder, president, or an officer in the organizations to which she belonged. These clubs allowed Ruby the opportunity to have leadership roles in the community at a time when African Americans and women were typically denied them.³⁴ She was a tireless and ceaseless activist for the welfare of the black women and children not only of her community but of the state of Illinois and the nation as well.

One organization which Ruby was heavily involved with was the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, which is the oldest African American secular organization in existence today.³⁵ It was founded in 1896 after two separate groups, the New Area Club of Boston and the Women’s Loyal Union, joined forces against the negative image of African American women that was being promulgated across the country. After this, more colored women’s clubs began to join this national association all with the purpose of joining forces to address “immediate and long range issues that impacted upon their communities”³⁶ and “securing the rights of women, children, and families.”³⁷ The typical member of this group (like so many other African

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ “Bloomington-Normal Deaths: Herman Edwards”

³¹ Ibid

³³ Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, <http://www.nacwc.org/>

³⁶ ed. Anne F. Scott and William Chafe. “Records of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs 1895-1992, Part 1 Minutes National Conventions, Publications, and President’s Office Correspondence,” vii, http://academic.lexisnexis.com/documents/upa_cis/1555_RecsNatlAssocColWmsClubPt1.pdf

³⁷ National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, <http://www.nacwc.org/>

American women's organizations) were like Ruby; colored women who were from humble walks of life, "many of them are wage earners, supplementing their husbands small salaries in their ambitious effort to give their children superior advantages; that these women have been denied opportunities which women of the other groups have enjoyed; that they have been the prey of human vultures, both white and black and yet have risen resplendent and triumphant, rejoicing in a pure noble Womanhood."³⁸

Illinois was one of the first states to join this organization in 1899.³⁹ Locally, Ruby belonged to the Civic Women's Club (formerly known as the Colored Woman's Club) which was organized in 1901 and joined the Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls that same year. The purpose of the Civic Women's Club was to bring "negro Women of the community together to stimulate a greater interest in Civic and Social Contact."⁴⁰ Ruby served as president of the club several times. At the state level, she was elected to the board of directors in 1959,⁴¹ served as president from 1964-1966, and was the group's historian at one time. She also organized the Education and Leadership training departments of the state association. She held training sessions throughout the state for eight years.⁴² At the national level, she was a member of the board of directors, general chairman, parliamentarian, and the treasurer.⁴³ She was a life time member of this organization and remained active until her death.

Ruby served on the board of directors of the McLean County Y.W.C.A. for six years. She served two terms as president of the board while the current YWCA location at the corner of Hershey Road and Empire Street was being built in the 1970s.⁴⁴

Ruby was also an active member of: the Raymond School PTA (while her son was in attendance); United Church Women of Bloomington-Normal (past president); the Bloomington-Normal branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (past president); National Council of Negro Women; Democratic Woman's Organization of McLean County (precinct committee woman); Illinois Citizen's Educational Committee (a statewide organization aimed at bettering public education); chairman of the Advisory Committee of the School of Practical Nursing (and was instrumental in making the school an effective educational institution); Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World (state president); Advisory Committee of the School of Practical Nursing; Bloomington Human Relations Commission (secretary); Woodhill Tenant's Council (president); Senior Citizen's Advisory Council for McLean County; Senior Action Center; Golden Age Club; East Central Illinois Area on Aging; and Mount Pisgah Baptist Church Mother's Board.⁴⁵

Continuing her passion to help improve the lives of those around her, especially the children, Ruby attempted to enter the political arena, running unsuccessfully for the District 87

³⁸ Davis, Elizabeth. "The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs 1900-1922,"

http://archive.org/stream/storyofillinoisf00davi/storyofillinoisf00davi_djvu.txt

³⁹ Edwards, Ruby A. "History of the Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc., 1901-1975," Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 4, Folder 2, McLean County Museum of History Archives

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ "Ruby Edwards, 71, civic leader, dies," *The Pantagraph*, December 31, 1977

⁴² "Past State President, Ruby Edwards," Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 4, Folder 2, McLean County Museum of History Archives.

⁴³ Letter from Ruby Edwards to Grave Stevens, May 15, 1970, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 4, Folder 2, McLean County Museum of History Archives.

⁴⁴ "Ruby Edwards, 71, civic leader, dies."

⁴⁵ Obituary from her funeral program, Bloomington Normal Black History Project, McLean County Museum of History

school board twice. In 1963 she was the only woman on the school ballot. In her own words, she stated that the West Side of Bloomington (where her own home was located) was not being represented on the Bloomington School Board. She felt it was her duty to give those residents, especially the children, a voice. She also wanted to retain the high status of the local educational system and continue to move the school system forward and “upgrade it to the educational standard” of the day.⁴⁶ She also ran unsuccessfully as a Democrat for a seat on the McLean County Board, losing by only 70 votes.

She was recognized for her efforts and work by receiving several awards. In 1965 she received a National Champion of Open Occupancy Award from the Foundation for Freedom and Democracy in Community Life. In 1976 she was given the Senior Citizen of the Month Award by the Kiwanis Club. Her living room walls were covered with distinguished service awards of appreciation from numerous organizations.⁴⁷

Ruby suffered another loss during the last years of her life. On September 16, 1970 her only child, Frank Hogan Jr., passed away at the age of 48. He died in Chicago from unknown causes. He was a veteran of World War II and had served in the European theater of operations in the 4002 Quartermaster Truck Company.⁴⁸ He was survived by his father (Frank Hogan Sr.), his mother Ruby, wife Lorraine, and seven grandchildren. He was brought back to Bloomington and buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.⁴⁹

Seven years later, Ruby died at Brokaw Hospital on Friday, December 30, 1977 at 10:50 a.m. after an illness lasting two months. She was survived by seven great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild. Her funeral was held Wednesday, January 4, 1978 at Mount Pisgah Baptist Church where she was an active member. Per her wishes, memorials were to be made to the Gladys Watt Scholarship Fund.⁵⁰ This was a scholarship award that was given annually to students who attended Bloomington High School to help them enroll at Illinois State University.⁵¹ Ruby had helped establish the scholarship while a member of the Civic Women’s Club.⁵² Bloomington-Normal lost a great civic leader and every organization in which she participated, local, state, and national, would miss her.⁵³ But her legacy would not be forgotten. She is buried next to her husband Herman, and her son Frank Hogan Jr. at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

By: Aingeal Stone, 2013

Edits and additions: Candace Summers, 2013

⁴⁶ “Mrs. Ruby Edwards Only Woman on School Ballot,” *The Pantagraph*, March 21, 1963

⁴⁷ Obituary from her funeral program.

⁴⁸ Headstone of Frank Hogan Jr. at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, section 20-314, www.evergreen-cemetery.com

⁴⁹ “Bloomington-Normal Deaths, Frank E. Hogan.”

⁵⁰ “Ruby Edwards,” (undated, unknown newspaper clipping)

⁵¹ “Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc., The Civic Women’s Club,” Bloomington Normal Black History Project, McLean County Museum of History Archives.

⁵² “Strickland, Morris Award Recipients,” *The Pantagraph*, March 6, 1969

⁵³ Obituary from Ruby Edwards Funeral Program