

Diary (Norfolk, Va.), 1902

The diary written by an African American woman in the early 20th century offers a fascinating study in the opportunities available to minorities, as well as their struggles to assert a sense of worth as well as pressure the white majority to grant them opportunities for advancement. Throughout the diary, there are references to meetings of the colored men's department of the YMCA, conferences intended for racial empowerment and equality, and mentions of key individuals in the National Medical Association and Tidewater Medical Society. By using these organizations as a framework, it was possible to ascertain the probable owner of the diary: Florence Barber, wife of Dr. Philip L. Barber.

The diary was originally listed as having been written in 1901, however, upon close examination, the actual date of the diary was revealed to be 1902. The quotes printed by the publisher of the *Physician's Daily Memorandum* at the top of each page were dated in the later months of 1901, meaning the diary could not have been written in that year. After making this observation, by plugging certain key events mentioned in the diary into a search engine, newspapers from 1902 confirmed the diary had to have been written in 1902. For instance, the author writes of the fire in the Columbia Atlantic Hotel which occurred on January 31st. *The New York Times* published an article saying the aforementioned hotel burned down on January 31, 1902 in Norfolk, Virginia.¹ The diary itself further supports this claim since the author mentions a volcanic eruption on the isle of Martinique in the May 8 entry. There was a catastrophic volcanic eruption on May 8, 1902 on the French held Martinique which destroyed a large portion of the island.²

This mention of Norfolk instead of Portsmouth prompted further investigation into the location of the diary's author. She often mentions visiting friends in Portsmouth and other locations in the surrounding area, but when talking of running particular errands, she simply states she went into town. This seemed particularly odd, especially when coupled with the fact that there was no mention of Norfolk despite the naming of all the surrounding locales. Another student established through her own research that it seemed likely that the YMCA in question throughout the diary was in fact the Norfolk YMCA, rather than the Portsmouth YMCA. In order to verify this information, further research was conducted using the diary as a guide. In her January 1, 1902 entry, the author of the diary mentions preparations for the first reception to be held in the new YMCA building. The *Jubilee Year Book of the Young Men's Christian Associations of North America* published in 1901, includes a picture of the Colored Men's Association Building in Norfolk, VA with the caption indicating its dedication in July of 1900.³ Further research proved that Norfolk was the only Colored YMCA in the area to have its own

¹ "Norfolk's Disastrous Fire: Virginia Town Suffered \$500,000 Loss in Destruction of Main Hotel and Business Block," *The New York Times*, 1 February 1902, accessed 11 November 2011, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9E0CE4DD1530E733A25752C0A9649C946397D6CF>

² Dr. Vic Camp, "Mt. Pelée Eruption (1902)," *How Volcanoes Work*, accessed 11 November 2011, http://www.geology.sdsu.edu/how_volcanoes_work/Pelee.html

³ Young Men's Christian Associations, *Jubilee Year Book of the Young Men's Christian Associations of North America*, (New York: Association Press, 1900), Hathi Trust Digital Library, *YMCA Year Book and Official Rosters, 1851-1901*,

<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?view=image;size=100;id=mdp.39015069277864;page=root;seq=320;num=252>

building.⁴ This information means the YMCA the author belonged to had to have been located in Norfolk. With this information, both the correct date of 1902 and the correct location of Norfolk, VA, it was possible to begin the search for the identity of the author.

The author mentions being re-elected president of YMCA on May 20. From context available throughout the rest of the diary, it becomes clear she was president of the Ladies Auxiliary of the YMCA. This organization was responsible for fundraising and planning the receptions of the YMCA.⁵ The purpose of the organization helps to explain many of the payments the author receives as well as the visitors to the authors home. One such visitor was a Mr. Dogan. A Mr. Charles C. Dogan was the general secretary of the YMCA of Norfolk indicating this is most likely the Mr. Dogan mentioned.⁶ Previous research conducted by another student suggested Mr. Dogan's wife, Lucy Dogan, was the author of the diary, but considering Mr. Dogan was mentioned as visiting, this seemed less likely. Additionally, the author mentions Alma Dogan on January 3rd, perhaps including a last name to distinguish Ms. Dogan from the other Alma mentioned throughout the diary. Due to these mentions, further inquiry into the matter was needed.

If Mrs. Dogan was not the author, the next logical candidate was the wife of the president of the Norfolk YMCA, Richard Hausber Bowling, named Lallie Howard Haynes Bowling. Dr. Bowling was the president of the YMCA and a prominent preacher in the area and as a consequence of such standing, would have had access to Mr. and Mrs. Hunton who are mentioned in the dairy. Mr. Hunton was the first General Secretary of the YMCA Colored Men's Department and was, as such, a high ranking member of the YMCA throughout the south. Upon further investigation, however, it became clear that the Bowlings did not have a daughter named Alma and Dr. Bowling did not have a birthday in May. The author of the diary had a daughter named Alma and the Dr. had a May 8 birthday so, Lallie Bowling could not be the author. After a long search through other officers and key individuals in the YMCA mentioned in scholarship about the YMCA at this time, it became clear that a new approach was needed in order to identify the author. It would have been wonderful to find some mention of the president of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Norfolk YMCA, but unfortunately current scholarship has focused on the New York YMCAs. The University of Minnesota possesses a large collection of YMCA documents and a finding aid lists a few documents pertaining to Norfolk, VA. Unfortunately, they are not digitized, so it would be necessary to request further details as to the contents.

The author mentions a conference she attended in Atlanta in August and, through a newspaper article search, this conference was identified as the The Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress (also known as the Christian and Educational Congress of Young Colored People at Atlanta) held August 6 to 11 of 1902. This conference had over 7,000 attendees and featured a number of prominent speakers.⁷ The author met with a number of influential individuals including Mr. Hunton, indicating some stature in the African American

⁴ Laura Harris Hughes and Laura V. Trieschmann, "Twelfth Street Young Men's Christian Association Building," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1994, <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/designations/samples/dc/YMCA.pdf>

⁵ Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk, Virginia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 24-25

⁶ Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 45

⁷"Conference of Negroes: Christian and Educational Congress of Young Colored People at Atlanta- Bishop Gaines's Encouraging Address," *New York Times*, August 7, 1902, accessed 11 November 2011, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F40711F63A5F12738DDDAE0894D0405B828CF1D3>

community. No other names became available through this search, but it did prove that the author was involved intimately in civil rights struggles and the advancement of African Americans at the time.

After this setback, a more thorough investigation of the diary was needed. Upon careful examination, a few more names emerged as possible means by which to identify the author. On _____ the author writes that the Dr. went to Richmond with his medical association and on June 26, writes that she received a letter from a Dr. Mischeaux. A search revealed that a Dr. Mischeaux was a member of the Medical Society of Virginia. Additional inquiry into this society revealed information about the National Medical Association. Since the American Medical Association refused membership to anyone of color, the doctor would have had to join either the Medical Society of Virginia and/or the National Medical Association. While further research into the matter is needed, a paper suggests that African Americans in Norfolk protested the exclusion from the American Medical Society in 1902, which was in keeping with the other activities mentioned in the diary. Further inquiry into the National Medical Association provided a list of prominent physicians in the Norfolk and Portsmouth area.⁸ A number were easily crossed off based on age, date of receiving medical degree, and children as well as mention in the diary itself, but a few proved promising such as Dr. P. L. Barber. In addition to serving as a local officer for the Norfolk area in the NMA, Dr. Barber was also involved in the Tidewater Medical Society which was responsible for providing medical care for the black population in Norfolk.

Dr. Barber was also an intriguing candidate based on the mention of a John or Johnnie Barber in the diary. The author provides a short description of her interactions with John Barber indicating a close relationship. The author also indicates a close relationship between the doctor and John Barber. Through additional research, P. L. Barber was revealed to be by Philip Lewis Barber.⁹ After attempting to reconstruct his life using obituaries which provided little information, a new avenue of investigation was needed. A search on a genealogy site recommended by the Norfolk Public Library, showed Philip L. Barber to have a wife named Florence and an adopted daughter named Alma. This information prompted an exploration of census records for Norfolk, Virginia. A description of Howard University School of Medicine Graduates published in 1900 showed Dr. Philip Lewis Barber to be both married and practicing medicine in Norfolk in 1900.¹⁰ By using census records from 1900, 1910, and 1920, Mr. Barber's occupation as a physician was established as well as the relationship to a Mr. John Barber listed as the brother of Philip Barber. It also listed an adopted daughter named Alma in 1900 and a wife named Florence Barber. The 1900 census showed Philip Barber to have been born in May of 1853 which supports the author's entry stating the doctor's birthday as May 8. A genealogical sight lists the Barber's as having a daughter named "Alena" in 1900¹¹, but upon

⁸ National Medical Association, "N.M.A. Communications," *Journal National Medical Association*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April-June, 1911), 173, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2621574/pdf/jnma00857-0065a.pdf>

⁹ Howard University, School of Medicine, *Howard University Medical Department, Washington, D.C.: A Historical and Statistical Souvenir, Part 3* (Ayer Publishing, 1900), 146, http://books.google.com/books?id=GQH4PYN4oUEC&pg=PA146&lpg=PA146&dq=philip+lewis+barber&source=bl&ots=iB7foBQ0u6&sig=7OP3KZRGujCp0kUW7NDrw8JSLp4&hl=en&ei=69nXToWYDabx0gGx3-XvDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&sqi=2&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=philip%20lewis%20barber&f=false

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 146

¹¹ Family Search, "United States Census, 1900 for Alena P Barber," accessed 11 November 2011, <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MMNK-S7R>

examination of the handwriting in the 1900 census, the "en" are strikingly similar to the authors "m."¹² This would also explain why there is no mention of an Alena after 1900. This information lends itself to the conclusion that Mrs. Florence Barber is the author of the diary.

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¹² Heritage Quest Online, "Census Image: Barber, Philipp L.," Heritage Quest Online, accessed 1 December 2011, <http://persi.heritagequestonline.com.proxy141.nclive.org/hqoweb/library/do/census/results/image?surname=barber&givenname=philipp&series=12&hitcount=1&p=1&urn=urn%3Aproquest%3AUS%3Bcensus%3B17847425%3B123416965%3B12%3B11&searchtype=1&offset=0>

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