

The Life of Rachel H. Flowers (1900-1988)

By Christina Thomas*

Flowers for Martha: Sentiment and Slippage in the Archives

“Let’s face it. I am a marked woman, but not everyone knows my name.”

—Hortense Spillers, *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book*



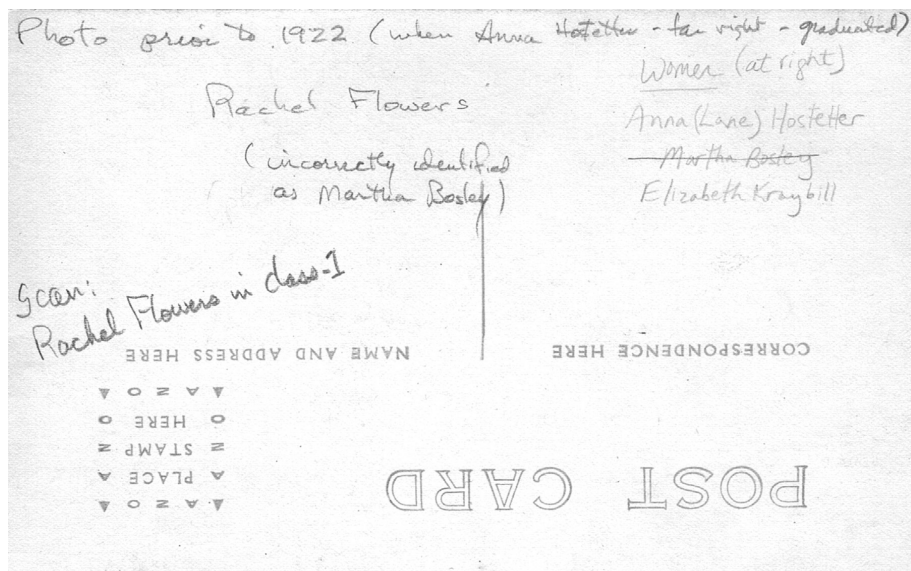
Classroom photo with Rachel Flowers (second from right). Photo courtesy of Messiah University Archives.

The photographer directed each student to gaze into the camera with one student standing out.¹ You notice her immediately. Her Blackness shines here, in this black-white printed image. She sits between two white

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¹ In the background you see a second, although blurred, photographer. Rachel Flowers in Class—1, 1916-1918, Messiah University Archives.

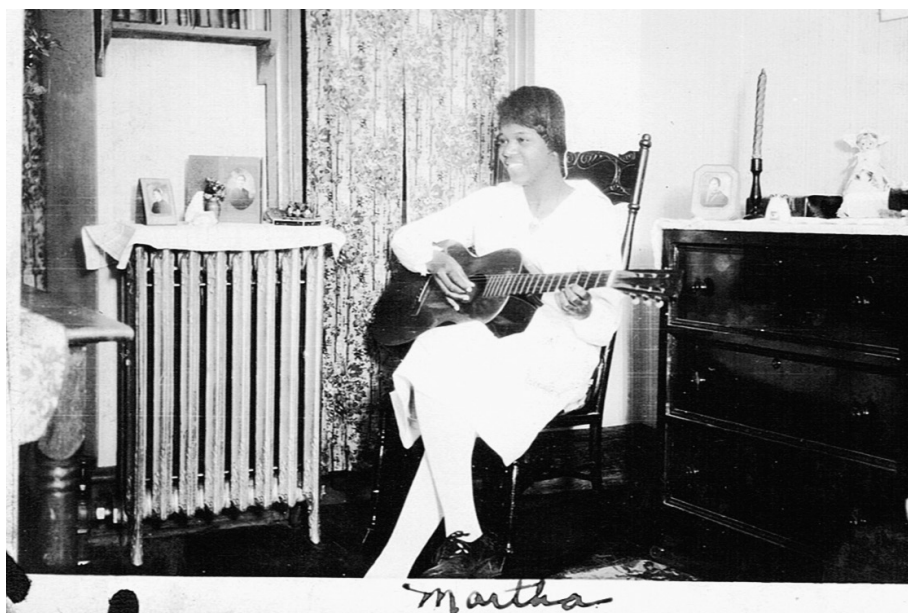
BRETHREN IN CHRIST
HISTORY & LIFE



Rachel Flowers was incorrectly identified as another student. Photo courtesy of Messiah University Archives.

young women and across from three white young men. She does not dress in the traditional Brethren in Christ women’s attire of a bonnet and “plain clothing,” but she still follows the modest dress code of the time. She wears her thick, black hair pinned back, away from her face, in what appears to be a low bun. She stands still, pen in hand, interrupted by the photographer’s request. A full smile does not grace her face, but neither does a frown. She seems content. Under the photographer’s direction, her eyes gaze into the camera’s lens. Through this photograph, she finds a place in the school’s archive. The front of this image tells this story—the story of the first Black student at Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home.² The

² A note on reading photographs: Drawing upon feminist historian and historian of photography Laura Wexler, Tina Campt challenged scholars to move past looking at photographs as merely “the way things were,” but rather read photographs as a record of intentions and a record of choices. She noted, “The question of why a photograph was made involves understanding the social, cultural, and historical relationships figured in the image, as well as a larger set of relationships outside and beyond the frame—relationships we might think of as the social life of the photo. The social life of the photo includes the intentions of both sitters and photographers as reflected in their decisions to take particular kinds of pictures. It also involves reflecting historically on what those images say about who these individuals aspired to be; how they wanted to be seen; what they sought to represent and articulate through them; and what they attempted or intended to project and portray.” Tina Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 6.



Rachel Flowers, incorrectly identified as Martha Bosley, *The Clarion*, Messiah College Archives, 1932. Photo courtesy of Messiah University Archives.

back of the image tells a second story, one of slippage and misnaming in a college's archive.

Known today as Messiah University, the institution initially identified this student as Martha Bosley. Born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania on March 29, 1909, Bosley attended Messiah Academy, the college's high school from 1926 to 1929 and Messiah Bible School from 1930 to 1932.³ In *The Clarion*, the school's yearbook, students left the following caption under an image of Bosley: "With banjo, song, and cherry smile, she makes the bluest days worthwhile."⁴ Believed to be the first African American student to attend Messiah, this revelation contradicted a 1918 photograph of the student body in which another Black student appears. In 2009, HieraId Edgardo Osorto, alumnus and former Director of Multicultural Programs, revealed that the student in the opening photo and Martha Bosley were two different

³ Martha Bosley's School Records, Messiah University Archives, Grantham, PA.

⁴ Messiah Bible School, *The Clarion* (Grantham, PA, 1932), 16, Messiah University Archives.

individuals.⁵ She, the student, was misnamed, and it took nearly a century for her to be properly identified. That year, a strikethrough appeared over Bosley's name with the following caption to the side, "Rachel Flowers (incorrectly identified as Martha Bosley)."⁶

Rachel Flowers became the first African American student to attend Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training home. Yet slippage in the archive blurred this tremendous achievement due the misnaming of one Black woman for another. Only within the past decade has Rachel's name and achievement became known to the Messiah community. Although present in the archive, this mistake had the power to remove her from the college's history. Many times, scholars, myself included, use this language of loss, discovery, and recovery when writing narratives of "hidden" unwritten figures. But many of these figures, like Rachel, were never lost, waiting to be discovered by a researcher or recovered by students interested in the college's past. They existed and lived, with or without our attention. Those who sat beside her in class that day knew her name, professors addressed her by name, her father called her by name, but it was an institution that failed to remember her name. This research and re-remembering are only the beginning of calling a school to look at its own past.

This article explores Rachel's biography including her time at Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home. As Bernardo Michael noted, "While Rachel left behind only faint traces in the historical record, her silence has spoken to us powerfully."⁷ Now what do these silences say? What can I make of these silences? As biographers, we search for those we research "by carefully reading and interpreting the fragmented messages they left behind."⁸ These photos, although not captured by Rachel, speak

⁵ In preparation for the college's centennial celebration, Hiald Edgardo Osorto, class of 2006, then director of the Office of Multicultural Programs at Messiah, began researching the first underrepresented students to attend Messiah College. As Hiald and his student researcher, Mollie Gunnoe, class of 2012, identified students, they determined that Martha, who later attended Messiah Academy (1926-1929) and Messiah Bible School (1931-1932) was the second African American person to attend the institution.

⁶ Rachel Flowers in Class—1 (cropped), 1916-1918, Messiah University Archives.

⁷ Staff Report, "First African-American Alum Honored at Three-Day Event," *The Bridge* (Messiah College), Fall 2018.

⁸ Staff in the introduction to *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, Barbara Ransby discussed biography as a method, its limitations, and the journey into studying someone's life. She stated, "As biographers, we ask questions about lives that the subjects themselves may never have asked outright and certainly did not consciously answer. . . . We search for them by carefully reading and interpreting

to her experience at Messiah Bible School. Other school records, such as the student handbook, general catalogue, and minutes from student organizations, work to inform and contextualize her college experience. Still, they only reveal so much. Therefore, throughout the article, I rely on informed speculation to fill in these gaps in Rachel's life.⁹ Phrases such as "Rachel thought," "Rachel may have," or "perhaps Rachel" signal my use of speculation. As a reader, you can decipher facts from these possible truths drawn from a fragmented archive.

Beyond her time at Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home, I explore her life and activism in Jim Crow Philadelphia through articles published in Black newspapers. In a city imagined as free from Jim Crow, overt forms of racial inequality presented themselves through residential and school segregation, job discrimination, and racial terrorism. Black Philadelphians who migrated to the city in the late 1920s voiced their concerns and protest in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, a Black newspaper considered "the voice of the Black community." Through pen, paper, and participation in various civil rights organizations, Rachel appeared in this newspaper. The *Tribune's* coverage of her life spanned the 1920s to 1950s and the 1970s and 1980s, documenting her activism, attendance at social events, and even her amateur golf career.¹⁰ To further inform Rachel's biography, I also turn to the personal papers of her youngest sister, Hilda Flowers Wilson (1910 -1975), where she detailed snippets of her childhood, and her niece, Geraldine Wilson, (1931-1986), who saved letters from her beloved Aunt Rae. As a biographer, I recognize the limitations of this work

the fragmented messages left behind. . . . No single descriptor ever seems adequate to capture the richly nuanced complexity of a life fully lived. Every term is inherently inadequate, each one loaded with someone else's meanings, someone else's baggage. How can a biographer frame a unique life, rendering it full-bodied, textured, even contradictory, yet still accessible for those who want to step inside and look around." Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2003), 2.

⁹ In her article, "Writing Early American Lives as Biography," Annette Gordon-Reed describes informed speculation as a method that provides readers with a "well-defined range of probable answers that still convey valuable food for thought. . . . Readers can accept the speculation or reject it based upon an assessment of the strength of the information offered to support it. . . ." Annette Gordon-Reed, "Writing Early American Lives as Biography," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2014): 506.

¹⁰ She also appeared in the *Chicago Defender*, the newspaper that largely influenced the Great Migration, and periodically Rachel appeared in the *Patriot News*, a local Harrisburg newspaper. In the 1920s, *The Evening News* (Harrisburg), *The Harrisburg Telegraph*, and *The Sentinel* (Carlisle) held a few articles about Rachel's education, parties, and travels.

or any work that seeks to fully capture the life of an individual. This is not a comprehensive biography of Rachel per se, but a series of glimpses into her life: her childhood, her time at Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home, and her activism in the City of Brotherly Love, where she resided until her death in 1988.

Early life in Florida and the migration north

On May 3, 1910, census enumerator George M. White documented the household of a 37-year-old “Mrs. N. J. P. Floisers [sic]” in Election Precinct 27 (Ortega), Jacksonville, Florida. White marked “Mrs. Floisers” as the only adult in the household, yet under marital status noted, “M1”—married, first marriage. In the columns for “Mother of How Many Children,” she informed the enumerator that she had nine children with only eight now living. White listed the children as follows: Chauncey (15), John (13), Fred (11), Rachel (nine), Theodore (seven), Vincent (four), Gladys (two), and Clifford (seven months).¹¹ He wrote the family’s racial identity as being mulatto—a characteristic either determined by the enumerator himself or stated by the mother.¹² In fact, White only documented mulatto households and white households in this precinct with no other non-white racial identities listed in that census.¹³ As the enumerator continued his Tuesday afternoon recording the households of her neighbors, Nancy continued that day’s chores, probably mentally preparing for another week without her husband, Harry, as he traveled for work.

¹¹ Out of the 496 households recorded in Precinct 27, only 71 households held the racial identity—mulatto—there were no Black residents documented in this district. The majority of occupations from these households were farmers, domestic workers, and laborers.

¹² This is the only census record that listed Nancy Flowers and her children as mulatto. In later census records and death certificates, they are listed as black.

¹³ Connected to the Jacksonville’s mainland by a wooden bridge in 1908, the “island of Ortega” became the next project for city developers looking to make the land a suburb. Perhaps longing to keep the emerging residential area free of Black Floridians, developers only allowed those who identify as “mulatto” to reside on the land. Keeping with this mission, the Flowers family either identified as “mulatto” to live in this community or the enumerator documented them as “mulatto” because of their residence in this emerging, affluent community. However, during oral interview with friends of the family and in the personal papers of family members, they alluded to the family’s African and Creek Indian ancestry. But given the lack of households marked as Black in this community, a question of why only mulattos and white Floridians reside here must be raised. What did developers want Ortega to look at? See Dena Snodgrass, *The Island of Ortega—A History* (Jacksonville, FL: Ortega Preservation Society, 1977).

By the turn of the twentieth century, Jacksonville emerged in the New South as “a prosperous, progressive city.”¹⁴ The city was the most populous in the state with a population well over 28,000. Although Black residents comprised 57 percent of this population, this Black-majority did not immune them from Jim Crow politics.¹⁵ In his autobiography, Black writer and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson concluded that although the city was a “good town for Negroes” during Reconstruction, by the 1900s racial segregation and white terrorism ran rampant across the city.¹⁶ By this time, Florida had one of the highest lynching rates in the nation with racial violence severing “African American claims to basic rights, dignity, and protection from the state.”¹⁷ As Paul Ortiz reminds us in his study of Black political organizing, Black Floridians continued to organize, forming a statewide movement against Jim Crow.¹⁸ Although much remains unknown about Rachel’s family participation in this movement, they occupied a peculiar position as a family of Black homeowners, skilled laborers, educators, and pastors.

The Flowers family held a rich history in the state of Florida. Rachel’s father, Harry Flowers (1846-1928), born enslaved in Florida, served as sergeant in the 21st United States Colored Troop during the American Civil War.¹⁹ Following the war, he returned to Jacksonville where he

¹⁴ James B. Crooks, *Jacksonville After the Fire, 1901-1919: A New South City* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1991), 34.

¹⁵ James B. Crooks, “Changing Face of Jacksonville, Florida: 1900-1910,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (April 1984): 439.

¹⁶ Crooks, “Changing Face of Jacksonville, Florida: 1900-1910,” 462.

¹⁷ Ortiz wrote, “Between 1882 and 1930, African Americans in Florida suffered the highest lynching rate in the United States. During those years, at least 266 black Floridians were lynched. In the same period, whites physically destroyed black communities, raped black women, and drove African Americans out of parts of central and south Florida designated by area residents as white homelands. “Too late to talk about the ‘suppressed vote’ now,” a black Floridian cried. “We are in the hands of the devil.” Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 61. Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 63.

¹⁸ Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 61.

¹⁹ In a deposition for Rosa E. Pappy on January 27, 1891, Flowers testified, “I am 43 years old, a carpenter, residence and P.O. Address is at Mandarin, Duval County, Fla. I was 5th duty Sergt. of Co. A 21 Regt U.S.C.T. and served from the fall of 1865 to until the M.O. [muster out] of our Co. April 25/66.” See “Florida History Online—the 21st United States Colored Infantry Regiment,” <https://www.unf.edu/floridahistoryonline/CIR/21.htm>.

worked as a farm hand and by the 1890s, a carpenter.²⁰ His status as a Civil War veteran made him a hero in his Black community.²¹ His wife, Nancy Sawyer, migrated as a young girl to Florida with her father and mother, Reverend Joseph J. and Susan Sawyer, business owner, educator and African Methodist Episcopal (AME) pastor. Reverend Sawyer, a former Freedmen's Bureau teacher from Southampton, Virginia, played a pivotal role in the opening of Edward Waters College, a historically Black AME school in the state.²² And until his death in 1919, he owned and operated a shoe repair business in downtown Jacksonville.

How did their positions in the community inform Rachel's girlhood in Florida from 1900 to 1913? Despite the lack of details surrounding Rachel's early years in the Sunshine State, federal and state archival records in addition to her family's history provide some insight.

Born in 1900, Rachel was Harry's and Nancy's first daughter and the couple's fourth child. By the time of 1910 Federal Census, her family resided on a farm in new suburb of Ortega. There, she watched her father, mother, and eldest siblings labor on the land—land the family owned. At the appropriate age, she attended one of the city's seven segregated elementary schools. With no high school for Black students, her brothers perhaps traveled to Edward Waters College for schooling, where their grandfather taught, or per the census record, found work as porters in local businesses or worked as farmhands for their parents. The children's maternal grandparents—Reverend Joseph J. and Susan Sawyer—also lived in town. Rachel likely spent time in their Jacksonville home or in her grandfather's downtown shoe shop listening as he planned his return to the AME Church.²³ Other days, she may have sat quietly around the kitchen

²⁰ 1880 US Census, Putnam County, Florida, population schedule, Precinct 6, p. B57, dwelling number 36, family 36; digital image, FamilySearch.org, accessed March 11, 2020.

²¹ Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 93.

²² In 1894, before Sawyer's departure from the AME. Church, Bishop T. M. D. Ward stated in his tour of the Jacksonville district that "the influence of Charles Pearce, W.W. Sampson, John Scott Sr., J. J. Sawyer, and Joseph E. Lee will never be obliterated." Bishop T. M. D. Ward, "Florida and It's Work-Then and Now," *The Christian Recorder*, April 19, 1894.

²³ On March 2, 1897, Sawyer organized the Independent AME. Church in his Jacksonville shoe shop. Out of this newly formed, 50-member denomination, his congregants elected him as Presiding Bishop. The AME Church sent Presiding Elder T. T. Gaines to report on Sawyer's "great rebellion of the State." The East Florida Conference expelled Sawyer and other members from the AME. Church as a result

table listening to the adults debate current events or tried to stay awake in the church pew as her grandfather shared that Sunday's sermon. As she became older, her responsibilities would have grown, especially when Nancy welcomed her eighth child.

With a growing family, Harry traveled between Florida and Pennsylvania for greater economic opportunity absent at the time of the 1910 census. That year's crop in addition to Harry Flowers' work as a traveling carpenter covered the home's mortgage and land taxes. What distinguished the Flowers family from others during this period was a third source of additional income. Beginning in July 1908, Harry received a war pension from the government, four quarterly payments starting at \$36.00.²⁴ Despite these multiple streams of income, a drought, hurricane, or bad crop season could leave their family losing their land. This all factored into Harry's decision to work away from home leaving his wife as the sole caretaker of eight children.²⁵ As one of the first states past the Mason-Dixon line, Pennsylvania was Harry's work state of choice. He first appeared in the 1912 Harrisburg's City Directory, listed as a carpenter.²⁶ This rural Floridian quickly adapted to urban life in the state's capital. Finding lodging in a nearby boarding home, every few weeks or so he sent money to Nancy to cover the mortgage and other household needs. This was a common trend among Black families in the rural South—fathers and sons traveling North for work, sending money South or preparing for

of their rebellion. In 1906, Sawyer returned to the AME Church. See "Bishop Gaines' Address," *The Christian Recorder*, March 10, 1898; T.T. Gaines, "The Florida Situation Described," *The Christian Recorder*, April 29, 1897; and Richard R. Wright, Centennial Encyclopedia of the AME Church Containing Principally the Biographies of the Men and Women, both *Ministers and Laymen, Whose Labors During a Hundred Years, Helped Make the A. M. E. Church What It Is* (Philadelphia, PA: AME Church, 1916), 310.

²⁴ Beginning in 1908, Harry received four payments of \$36.00 for his military service. In 1913, this amount increased to \$43.50 and by 1922, \$150.00. According to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), today his pension ranged from \$1,138.05 (1913-\$43.50) to \$2,275.64 (1922-\$150.00). Harry F. Flowers, "United States Veterans Administration Pension Payment Cards, 1907-1933," database in FamilySearch.org (accessed May 1, 2020). Original Source: United States Veterans Administration Pension Payment Cards, 1907-1933, NARA microfilm publication M850 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Record Administration, n.d.).

²⁵ In Florida, Black farmers and farmhands experienced huge economic loss during the early twentieth century due to hurricanes and boll weevil infestations, yet the Flowers also received two supplemental income streams during this time—Harry's Civil War pension and profits from his carpentry work.

²⁶ W. H. Boyd, *Boyd's Directory of Harrisburg and Steelton Containing the Names of the Citizens New Map and Street Guide* (n.p.: W. H. Boyd, 1914), 311.

the family's move. But Harry never sent for his entire family, or he possibly did, with his wife choosing to remain in Florida. In 1913, the children joined their father in Pennsylvania without their mother.²⁷

That year, a 13-year-old Rachel probably cradled her three-year-old sister in her lap, as she and her siblings traveled by train to live with their father.²⁸ It is possible that her older brothers left first or given the age of the youngest, the eight children all traveled together. Nevertheless, the Flowers children were not alone in this journey. Thousands of other Black southerners journeyed by train for urban cities in other parts of the South and North. Historians later termed this mass movement the Great Migration. As most southern migrants settled in large metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia—the focus of many studies on the Great Migration—the Flowers children moved from one rural space, a farmland in Jacksonville, to another, a farmland in Churchtown Village, a small, rural Pennsylvania community.²⁹ Perhaps as a skilled laborer with a war pension, Harry could afford to live in this small town as opposed to a larger, crowded urban city. Or perhaps knowledgeable of the area through his work with John E. Dare, he scouted the area, found comfort in Churchtown, and rented a home from his employer before sending for his children.³⁰ Lastly, at the age of 68, he longed for a more rural community to raise his eight children as opposed to a bustling urban

²⁷ In a brief biography about her mother, Hilda Wilson (née Flowers), Geraldine Wilson wrote, “Hilda C. Wilson was born on in Jacksonville, Florida on April 8, 1910, the last child of Nancy Sawyer Flowers and Harry Florence Flowers. At three years of age, her sisters and brother moved to a farm outside of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.” Geraldine Wilson, “Hilda Flowers: A Biography,” 1975, Box 2, Folder 12 [Family], Geraldine Wilson Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Book Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, New York.

²⁸ Nancy remained in Jacksonville, Florida and moved north during the 1920s with her husband Henry Sams and their son, Henry Sams Jr. See, Geraldine Wilson, “Biography,” 1975, Box 2, Folder 4, Geraldine Wilson Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Book Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

²⁹ In Churchtown Village is an unincorporated area within Monroe Township, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania (just outside of Boiling Springs on the north side of the Yellow Breeches Creek). In every federal census from 1860 to 2010, Monroe Township was predominately white with an average of over 90 percent white residents. In the 1920 Federal Census, the Flowers were one of two non-white families out of 361 families who lived in the Monroe Township.

³⁰ Harry rented a country farm from John E. Dare, whom he possibly worked for, between 1913 and 1919. In May 1919, he saved enough money for a mortgage, purchasing the home from Dare. John Huffman, Professor of History at Messiah College, wrote in research notes on the Flowers family, “Harry’s occupation on the 1920 Federal Census is listed as an interior house carpenter, while John E. Dare

environment. Settling in Churchtown Village, the children referred to this country farm as “Greenview Dwellings.”³¹

In this foreign state, Rachel lived hundreds of miles away from her childhood home and for the first time without her mother.³² She had to adjust to the weather, a predominately white and relatively small town compared to Jacksonville, and to the parenting style of her father. But the farm, a rural-to-rural migration, offered some level of familiarity. The winters, at first, were a huge adjustment for the Flowers children who had never seen snow or experienced such cold weather. Rachel later recalled in a letter, “Sometimes it began snowing the early part of November and we didn’t see the ground again, until the early April rains came and washed the snow, ice, etc. away.”³³ But the children adapted to the weather, perhaps playing among themselves, schoolmates, and neighbors in the snow. Soon, Brandtsville became home. Harry Flowers and his children built a life in this community and traveled frequently into Harrisburg. On Sundays, they attended Wesley AME Zion Church at South Street and Tanner Avenue, one of the oldest Black churches in the city.³⁴ At home, Rachel, as the eldest

appears in the 1910 Federal Census as living at 1530 Regina Street in Harrisburg (with wife Ettie -- this address is off North 16th Street near Reservoir Park) and his occupation was building contractor. I strongly suspect then, that Harry went to work for Mr. Dare’s building firm as a carpenter from 1913-1919, and by 1919 had saved enough for a mortgage enabling the purchase of the Churchtown Village farm property in 1919 from Mr. Dare.” Joseph Huffman, E-mail message to the author, June 13, 2014.

³¹ In May 1919, he saved enough money for a mortgage purchasing the home from Dare. In 1945, the Flowers children sold the home to a John E. Dare. “Home News”, News Comet, April 13, 1945.

³² Hilda Flowers later stated in a letter to her daughter, Geraldine, that she felt abandoned by her mother. “I believe that _____ will get over her mother deserting her, the same as I did,” Hilda shared with her daughter in 1975. Rachel may or may not have shared similar sentiments. But when her mother moved to Philadelphia, she resided with her in the 1940s. Letter from Hilda Wilson to Geraldine Wilson, August 14, 1975. Box 1, Folder Hilda Flowers, Christina Thomas Papers, Messiah University Archives. Grantham, PA.

³³ Letter from Rachel Flowers to Geraldine Wilson. February 20, 1978. Box 2, Folder Correspondence, Geraldine Wilson Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Book Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

³⁴ Wesley Union AME. Zion Church was a cornerstone of Harrisburg’s Black community. Originally located in the city’s Eighth Ward, Wesley served “as a place of worship, a school for children and adults, a distribution center, and a refuge for African Americans fleeing the South in search of freedom and a better way of life.” John Weldon Scott and Eric Ledell Smith, *African Americans of Harrisburg* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 32. See also Michael Barton and Jessica Dorman, “Notable History of Wesley Union A.M.E. Zion Church,” in *Harrisburg’s Old Eighth Ward* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 36-40.

daughter, carried the responsibilities of caring for the household. The burden grew as her brothers, Chauncey, John, and Fred, left the family's home.

Due to archival limitations, Rachel's girlhood is difficult to reconstruct. How did a father who was formerly enslaved raise his children? What values did he instill in them that might differ from Black parents a generation removed from slavery? In his youngest daughter's biography, his granddaughter wrote:

In a family raised by her father [Harry Flowers], she [Hilda Flowers] received from him and her ancestors a rich legacy that included a value system built on love of justice and moral right, a belief that children are central to the concern of the family and deep love and commitment to Afrikan peoples. She carried these things with her throughout her life nourished by the idea of Afrika that she received in stories that had been passed to her from her father.³⁵

What family stories did he share with his children by the fireplace or around the dinner table? What lessons did he teach his young children as they adapted to life up North? This statement provides a glimpse, although small, into the Flowers children's upbringing—an upbringing that produced generations of activists, dedicated to racial equality. Given the denial of an education to enslaved people, like Harry, and Rachel's grandfather's work in Freedman schools and Edward Waters College, education also became part of this value system.³⁶

For African Americans, education walked hand-in-hand with freedom. In antebellum times, enslaved people sought to become literate despite the repercussions of the law prohibiting the education of such persons. After the Civil War, freed people organized within their communities, at times

³⁵ Geraldine Wilson, "Biography." 1975, Box 2, folder 4, Geraldine Wilson Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Book Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. In *From Plan to Planet: Life Studies, the Need for Afrikan Minds and Institutions*, Haki R. Madhubuti laid out four reasons for using "k" in Afrika as oppose to "c." For many Black activists, Afrika represented an embrace of Afrikan languages challenging the European spelling of the continent which substituted the letter "c" for "k" or the K sound—"as in Kongo and Congo, Akkra and Accra, Konakri and Conakry." Haki R. Madhubuti, "'Four Reasons for Using 'K' in Afrika'" The State of History, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://soh.omeka.chass.ncsu.edu/items/show/692>

³⁶ Born in the world as another man's property, Sawyer, by unknown means, acquired an education by 1866. Among his first actions as a freedman involved the construction of Black schools in Southampton, Virginia. A few years later he served in these schools as a teacher and in the community as a pastor.

receiving funds from government agencies such as the Freedman Bureau, to build schools and to educate their children.³⁷ This determination for an education continued into the twentieth century. Per the 1910 census, each child of school age in the Flowers household attended school. In Jacksonville, Rachel had to go to a segregated elementary school while her older brothers had limited educational opportunities given the lack of Black high schools in the city. But in Pennsylvania, the children were provided with many more educational opportunities including the chance to complete a high school diploma. Although segregation and educational inequalities still existed throughout the state, in Churchtown Village, Rachel was able to attend Boiling Springs High School. Nothing is known about her experience there, but on April 28, 1916, the *Sentinel*, a local newspaper published Rachel's name among a list of students who "made the required average in the County Diploma examination and have been granted Common School Diplomas."³⁸ After completing her studies at Boiling Springs High, Rachel enrolled at Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home, a school only a few miles from her home.

Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home



Rachel Flowers in class. Photo courtesy of Messiah University Archives.

Established in 1909, Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home opened its doors to any student of good character and intention. Fulfilling the Brethren in Christ Church's desire for a denominational school, Messiah admitted students "irrespective of

³⁷ For more on Black education during enslavement and during and after the Civil War, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1998); V. P. Franklin, *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of the Faith of the Fathers* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1984); Heather A. Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2005).

³⁸ "Diploma Examination," *The Sentinel* (Carlisle, PA), April 28, 1916.

race, color, sex, creed or faith, who believe in the deity of Jesus Christ.”³⁹ It opened, tuition-free, with 12 students in the home of its first president, Bishop Samuel Rogers Smith, in downtown Harrisburg. By the end of the school’s first year enrollment increased to 37 students. As enrollment increased over the years, the school moved to the rural village of Grantham.

The school’s bulletin described Grantham as “little more than a growing hamlet” with “meandering streams, wooded hilltops, fertile, verdant meadows.”⁴⁰ The campus included President Smith’s new home, the private residences of professors, and the main school building (Old Main), comprised of classrooms, study rooms, a dining hall, the main office, a small library, and student dormitories. In the school’s first decade, it experienced many setbacks—decreased enrollment, financial issues, and in 1916, just weeks before Rachel’s first day, the death of President Smith. At its peak, in 1914-1915, Messiah had an enrollment of 140 students. By 1916, this number dropped to 125. A board member critiqued, “The School would have a larger patronage would it not take so rigid a stand as it does against secret societies, etc.”⁴¹ In terms of recruitment, faculty members encouraged young congregant members to study at the school. But oftentimes the students served as the best recruiters.⁴²

One of the biggest questions surrounding Rachel’s life is her choice to attend Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home. By 1916, she completed all public school requirements in Cumberland County.⁴³ Her father, by then 71 years old, still supported Rachel and her three youngest siblings, Vincent (10), Gladyce (eight), and Hilda (five). With pressing

³⁹ It continued, “(A) Who are not members of secret or oath-bound societies, excepting they promise to release or relinquish their affiliation with the same. (B) Who do not make use of profane or vulgar language, and who are not addicted to the use of intoxicants in any form, opium products, narcotic, or the use of tobacco in any form . . . or abstain from all these as long as they are members of the school.” The Incorporating Board, or Board of Managers was comprised of Jacob Engle, D. V. Heise, Charles Baker, B. F. Hoover, Eli Engle, and S. R. Smith. See both E. Morris Sider, *Messiah College: A History* (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Press, 1984), 28; and The Brethren in Christ, *Minutes of the Incorporating Board of The Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home*, (Harrisburg, PA: Press of Hill News, 1907), 14.

⁴⁰ Seventh Annual Catalogue of Messiah Bible School and Training Home, 1916-1917, (Grantham, PA: Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home, 1916), 11.

⁴¹ Minutes of the General Conference of the Brethren in Christ, May 15-19, 1916, Cross Roads Meeting House, Florin, PA, 21.

⁴² E. Morris Sider, *Messiah College: A History* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1984), 82.

⁴³ Rachel Flowers’ enrollment records, Messiah University Archives.

medical issues, Harry also required a caregiver and was unable to provide for his youngest siblings by himself. While Rachel wanted to pursue a higher education, she also needed to remain close to home. Messiah fulfilled both needs. A second factor may rest in one student. In the opening image, Rachel sits in between two women, Elizabeth Kraybill and Anna Lane. Kraybill, the granddaughter of Bishop Smith, attended Messiah Academy and Messiah Bible School from 1916 to 1923.⁴⁴ She was also Rachel's neighbor. Were the two friends? Did Kraybill's family ties and enrollment make Messiah a suitable place for Rachel to continue her education, one her father was comfortable with funding? Or again, was it the school closest to Rachel's family? Nonetheless, that fall she enrolled at Messiah, joining an incoming class of 20 students. Whether unknown or known to her, she became the school's first Black student.

Rachel spent the last few weeks of her summer going through the school's required readings which included Robinson Crusoe, five speeches by Abraham Lincoln, and six selected books of the Bible.⁴⁵ The courses or "majors" offered by Messiah Bible School ranged from Bible and missionary training courses to business and music Courses.⁴⁶ Rachel chose to study within the Commercial Course, designed for students who wanted training

⁴⁴ Contradicting school records, the editor of her class's yearbook Elizabeth Kraybill wrote, "In the fall of 1914 she entered the Messiah Bible School. Unfortunately, she had to stop school for several years; but at last, thru her earnest efforts, she completed the course. . . . Elizabeth was converted at the age of eleven and has been a loyal follower of her Master."

⁴⁵ Full list of readings for first year students: (a) Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, (b) New Testament: I John, Acts, (c) Prose Fiction 1. Robinson Crusoe (DeFoe), (d) Essays 1. Lincoln's a. Two Inaugural Addresses b. Speeches in Independence Hall c. Speech at Gettysburg d. Last Public Address e. Letter to Horace Greely 2. A Memoir or Estimate of Lincoln (c) Poetry 1. Elegy in Country Church Yard (Gray) 2. Deserted Village (Goldsmith) 3. Ode to a Nightingale (Keats) 4. Crossing the Bar (Tennyson) 5. Home Thoughts from Abroad (Browning) 6. Home Thoughts from the Seas (Browning). Found in the Seventh Annual Catalogue of Messiah Bible School and Training Home, 1916-1917, 26.

⁴⁶ Each course was designed to give "students the necessary discipline and culture to qualify them to enter the world's arena without a moral or intellectual handicap and to faithfully represent the standard of conduct implied in the name of the school." Seventh Annual Catalogue of Messiah Bible School and Training Home, 1916-1917, 10.

in business fundamentals.⁴⁷ Its description read, “The object of the courses in this department is to develop capable and well-trained Stenographers, Typists, Bookkeepers, Accountants, Commercial Teachers and Private Secretaries.”⁴⁸ This course’s tuition was \$1.00 per week with an additional \$0.25 to \$0.50 per elective class. In alignment with the recommended two-year course outline, she enrolled in the following classes: Bible, Biology, Latin, Physical Culture, Arithmetic, English, and Penmanship. Although the school’s fall semester was set to begin on September 19, a quarantine due to infantile paralysis (polio) postponed the school year to September 29.⁴⁹

That morning of the September 29 began early for Rachel who hoped to arrive on campus before her 8:00 a.m. class. As the student handbook noted, “Students reporting tardy to any class shall have their grade for the day reduced such number of points as the time of and reason for the tardiness may merit.”⁵⁰ Given the school’s location less than two miles from her family’s home in Brandtsville, she either walked with her neighbor Elizabeth or had her father drop her off by wagon at the school’s gates if the weather prevented her from traveling by foot. Coming up by the school’s entrance, she saw the main building in the distance. The school bell rang in the distance, noting the beginning of classes in few minutes. Was she nervous? Did she know any of the students, outside of Elizabeth Kraybill? With class beginning soon, she approached the building.

⁴⁷ Enos H. Hess presented the controversy this course caused among the Board of Trustees in “Report of the Faculty of the Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home, Grantham, PA., approved.” He wrote, “We have had criticism in respect to this course as not properly belonging to a Bible School.” He validated the need for this course by stating, “With the need and use of shorthand and typewriting by the Church and the request from even prospective missionary students for instruction along commercial lines, and the nature of the work to be attempted by the school according to the articles of incorporation, we cannot see a just cause for the discontinuance of the work as now offered.” Minutes of the General Conference of the Brethren in Christ, May 15-19, 1916, Cross Roads Meeting House, Florin, PA, 28.

⁴⁸ Seventh Annual Catalogue of Messiah Bible School and Training Home, 1916-1917, 10.

⁴⁹ The semester’s beginning shifted by two weeks. In the “School Notes” section of the September 18, 1916 *Evangelical Visitor*, 5, editor George Detwiler explained that attendance was not as large as anticipated given the infantile paralysis, or polio, quarantine “which will hold for all students under sixteen years of age until September 29th.”

⁵⁰ Seventh Annual Catalogue of Messiah Bible School and Training Home, 1916-1917, 14.

Each weekday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Rachel attended her classes and the required study periods. In the five photographs of Rachel at Messiah, four capture her in the classroom. Perhaps at the direction of the photographer or given the seating arrangement, Rachel was the focus point in the above photo on page 15. With mathematical symbols written on the board, she may have been in her commercial math course or given that only women were in this photograph, a lady's study hall. In this image, Rachel and another unidentified woman appear to be the only individuals unbothered by the presence of the camera, continuing their reading assignment. Given the ink jar and papers across from her, did that young woman slide down to be included in the photo? Did the women's laughter and distraction bother the two readers—one with her hand supporting her face and Rachel, whose body is slightly turned away from her peers. I wonder what life was like in these classrooms for her.

Only one photograph of Rachel outside of the classroom exists in the Messiah University Archives. It is a smaller, square image in comparison to the others printed as postcards. The majority of the women looked into



the camera except for one who felt the need to readjust her friend's flower crown. They both wear large hair bows, separating them from the Brethren in Christ faith tradition. Are they sisters? Are classes even in session? The group appears to be on campus abiding by the school's rules for outside exercise: (1) "that male and female students shall not associate with

Rachel Flowers, campus life. Photo courtesy of Messiah University Archives.

each other except with the presence of a teacher”⁵¹ and (2) “not less than three young women shall be in a group.”⁵² As Tina Campt reminds researchers who encounter images, photographs are “a record of intentions and a record of choices.”⁵³ Someone decided for the group to pose this way and to capture them in this field. Three were chosen to sit on the log, careful not to ruin their white attire, and two wore crowns perhaps in celebration. The weather must have been pleasant given the lack of winter attire and with bare trees in the distance it appears to be a cool fall day. This photograph suggests Rachel’s inclusion in non-academic related activities, but I chuckled to myself, “*She don’t look happy and neither does the person beside her.*”

As a commuter student, Rachel’s experience on campus differed greatly from others. According to the student guide, boarders arose to the rising bell from Monday to Saturday at 6:00 a.m. (on Sunday the school blessed them with an additional 30 minutes).⁵⁴ She neither had to rise to the sound of this bell nor retire by the mandatory time of 10:15 p.m. She lived in her father’s house and abided by his rules. Whereas, residential students sought approval to leave campus even to visit family, Rachel had the liberty to leave as she pleased at the conclusion of the school day. As a non-boarding student, the school exempted her from mandatory religious services on the Sabbath which included Sunday school, a morning service, and an evening service. Rachel worshipped with her family at their home church of Wesley AME Zion. Still, she had a few religious requirements, including a Bible course, and possibly her attendance was mandatory at Tuesday evening prayer meeting. The school also encouraged participation in student organizations such as Missionary, Purity, and Literary Society meetings. The Milton Literary Society documented Rachel’s membership in the organization’s minute records.

As the most popular student organization on campus, the Milton Literary Society provided a space for students to learn how to publicly debate. It aimed to “train the students in public address and parliamentary

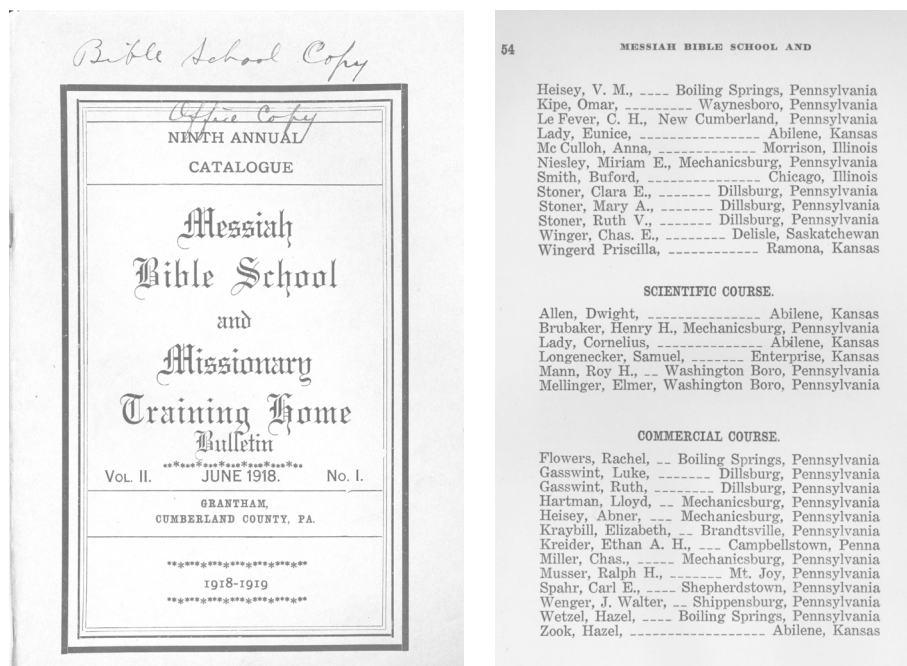
⁵¹ Seventh Annual Catalogue of Messiah Bible School and Training Home, 1916-1917, 64.

⁵² Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home, Student Guide, (Grantham, PA: Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home, 1916) 19-20.

⁵³ Tina Campt, *Image Matters*, 6.

⁵⁴ Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home, Student Guide, 1916, 23.

rules governing deliberative bodies.”⁵⁵ Minutes from the December 15, 1916 meeting marked Rachel’s first documented participation with the society. She opened the meeting with a hymn, “Jesus, Lover of my Soul.” A presentation by Milthe Patterson, her neighbor, Elizabeth Kraybill, and Martha Kauffman followed the song selection.⁵⁶ In the spring, she read her first oration to the group—“A False Motto”—with the accompanying selection led by members, “My Country, ’Tis of Thee.”⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the Society only provided essays and song titles of that day’s program and not descriptions. Rachel had a strong standing in the Milton Literary Society and by the end of her first year, members of the society elected her and three other students as assistant editors for the fall semester. That upcoming term, they also elected Elizabeth Kraybill as vice president.⁵⁸



Eighth Annual Catalogue of Messiah Bible School and Training Home, 1917-1918, including listing of students’ names. Images courtesy of Messiah University Archives.

⁵⁵ Seventh Annual Catalogue of Messiah Bible School and Training Home, 1916-1917, 64.

⁵⁶ Milton Literary Society, Minutes, December 15, 1916, Messiah University Archives.

⁵⁷ Milton Literary Society, Minutes, April 27, 1917.

⁵⁸ Milton Literary Society, Minutes, May 27, 1917.

BRETHREN IN CHRIST
HISTORY & LIFE

In her final year at Messiah, Rachel began her role as assistant editor of the Milton Literary Society. She read the following papers: “A Visit to Hospice of St. Bernard” and “Looks Aloft.” She concluded one of the final meetings of the semester with the song, “Star of the East.”⁵⁹ Her love for singing carried its way from her grandfather’s AME Church in Florida to Wesley AME Zion in to elective courses at Messiah. In fact, the only elective courses she enrolled in were sight-singing and expression (drawing?). She later participated in the women’s chorus although no extensive organizational records remain today.

It is difficult to speak about Rachel’s experience as a Black girl at the institution. It is even difficult for me, as a biographer and alumna of the school, to speculate on this part of her life. As an institution built on a foundation of inclusivity, acceptance of her may have failed to translate unto the student body. I ponder at these photographs of Rachel in the classroom and think about the moments beyond this space. Did students object to her being there? Who did she eat lunch with? Did students stare at her? Did they ask questions or even touch her hair? How did it feel to be the only one, the only Black person, at the institution, never able to blend in, but always standing out? If I speculate that she had a pleasant experience, I could be wrong,



Messiah Bible School student body, Winter Term 1918. Photos courtesy of Messiah University Archives.

⁵⁹ Milton Literary Society, Minutes, May 1918.

and if I speculate that she had a horrific experience, I could also be wrong because no documents inform me of her sentiments surrounding Messiah. But based on the experiences of Messiah's Black alumni, like myself, I can probably conclude that her experience was different and at times difficult compared to her white counterparts. Photographs, organizational minutes, and enrollment records tell me that she was there, capturing some of her experiences, but none can speak to entirety of her time at the institution.

Rachel graduated that summer of 1918. Although her brother's graduation from Messiah Academy found its way into the pages of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, a Black newspaper in the state, there was no public announcement for Rachel.⁶⁰ After commencement, she and her proud family took the trek from Messiah to their home one last time. There is no evidence suggesting she ever returned to campus for gatherings or alumni events. In the university archives, she appears in one more place—The Orthos, the school's alumni yearbook. This document placed Rachel at her family's home in Brandtsville in 1922, four years after her graduation. At the time, she worked as a housekeeper (at home). It seemed that post-graduation, she continued in her role as caretaker for her family. But local newspapers also begin to inform us of Rachel, the emerging Black socialite.

In 1922, the *Evening News* made several announcements about Rachel's travels in its societal section, updates on personal affairs of residents in the community. Most likely authored and submitted by Rachel herself, a July article read, "Miss Rachel H. Flowers, who has been in this city [Harrisburg] for several weeks, has returned to her country home in Brandtsville."⁶¹ The year before, another article detailed her weekend trip to Philadelphia in early September.⁶² Early on, Rachel began to self-fashion herself into a socialite in these non-Black newspapers. Another local newspaper, the *Harrisburg Telegraph*, featured the first of many parties and dinners hosted by Rachel at Greenview Dwellings. "Miss Rachel H. Flowers of Brandtsville," the article

⁶⁰ The article read, "Vincent A. Flowers of Boiling Springs, Pa., who is a senior at Grantham College, in Grantham, PA. The commencement exercises will be held in the college auditorium Wednesday June 1, 1927 at nine o'clock. Mr. Flowers has done credible work and will be the fifth to graduate. He will enter the University of Pennsylvania in the Fall," "Graduates," *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 2, 1927.

⁶¹ "Personal Briefs," *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, PA), July 7, 1922.

⁶² "Personal Briefs," *The Evening News*, September 3, 1921.

read, “entertained a chicken and waffle dinner at her country home.”⁶³ The youngest guests included her siblings Gladyce and Hilda. But this would be Rachel’s last year in her father’s house. The next month, the household experienced another shift, Rachel’s move out. That September, she left for Sulderville, Maryland, to work as a public school teacher.⁶⁴ The following year, Vincent also left Greenview Dwelling, enrolling at Messiah Academy to complete his high school requirements.

Despite the distance between Sulderville and Brandtsville, Rachel traveled home often, with newspapers keeping the community informed of her returns.⁶⁵ But on April 26, 1928, the *Philadelphia Tribune* begin to cover Rachel’s affairs. It shared not of Rachel’s out-of-state travels or parties, but that “Miss Rachel H. Flowers was suddenly called to her home at Harrisburg to attend her father who is ill.”⁶⁶ Given the coverage from a Philadelphia-based newspaper, Rachel most likely migrated to the city between 1923 and 1928. In Brandtsville, Rachel remained with her family for the remainder of that spring and summer. On July 7, she even entertained some of Harrisburg’s most prominent Black schoolteachers at Greenview Dwellings. Due to the weather, she shifted the party’s plans moving the event indoors. With guests traveling from as far as Baltimore, she transformed the living room and dining room into a garden oasis that “soon made the guests forget the unfavorable weather.” The author of the article, presumably Rachel, wrote, “The afternoon was very pleasantly spent in ‘500’ [card game] and dancing.”⁶⁷ But unfortunately the evening took a grave turn. Later that night,

⁶³ “Miss Rachel Flowers Hostess at Summer Home,” *Harrisburg Telegraph* (Harrisburg, PA), August 11, 1922.

⁶⁴ “Personal Notes,” *The Patriot News* (Harrisburg, PA), September 14, 1922.

⁶⁵ They also noted in 1923 the movement of her teaching career from Sulderville to Stevensville, 30 miles west of the city, after she visited her father. “Personal Jottings,” *Harrisburg Telegraph* (Harrisburg, PA), September 22, 1923.

⁶⁶ Given the newspaper’s location, it is possible that Rachel migrated to the City of Brotherly Love from Maryland between 1923, according to the article’s publication Untitled, *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 26, 1928; One article published by the *Tribune* spoke about a Rachel Flowers speaking on “Christian Endeavor in all Lands” at Wesley AME. Zion (Philadelphia) Christian Endeavor Society on October 26, 1927. It is possible that Rachel either moved to Philadelphia or visited the city for that event. “Wesley Christian Endeavor Society Gives a Social,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 3, 1927.

⁶⁷ “Entertains Teachers at Country Home,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 12, 1928.

Harry passed away at home, a day after a visit from the family's doctor.⁶⁸ His death was most likely expected for a month before he deeded the house to his children.⁶⁹ From her father, Rachel inherited his Civil War pension. Instead of selling the home, the children used Greenview Dwellings as a vacation space. Hilda, just turning 18, moved with Rachel into a boarding home in Philadelphia. And by the 1930s, the youngest of the Flowers—Rachel, Vincent, Gladyce, and Hilda—all lived in the City of Brotherly Love.

The City of Brotherly “Love”

By the late 1920s, Philadelphia held one of the largest Black communities in the urban North. As a mecca for Black migrants, the city's African American population nearly doubled between 1920 and 1930 to over 220,000 black residents out of 1.9 million (11.3 percent of the population).⁷⁰ Yet in Philadelphia, a place imagined as free, Jim Crow lurked throughout the city's segregated schools, segregated neighborhoods, and job discrimination. Although no overt markers of Jim Crow stood before waiting rooms, water fountains, and within the public transportation system, Black migrants, in search of a promised land outside of the cruel South, failed to find one in the

⁶⁸ “Harry Flowers died Saturday at this home at Boiling Springs. Funeral services will be held...at Wesley AME. Church, this city [Harrisburg]. The Rev. Rufus Hawkins will officiate. Burial will be in Lincoln Cemetery. He is survived by eight children: Chauncy S., John C., of New York; Rachel H., of Philadelphia; Theodore W., of Philadelphia; Vincent A., of Philadelphia, Gladyce C., of Philadelphia; Hilda, of Boiling Springs; Mrs. George Conway (Mary). Two grandchildren also survive him.” “Obituary—Harry Flowers,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, July 9, 1928. Rachel completed the corresponding information for her father's certificate of death on July 9, 1928. Age—83. Color or Race—Colored. Date of birth—February 23, 1845. Occupation of Deceased—Carpenter. Birthplace—Florida. Name of Father—Unknown. Birthplace of Father—Florida. Name of Mother—Unknown. Birthplace of mother—Florida. The birthplace of Harry's parents is supported by both the 1883 Florida State Census and the 1910 Federal Census Record. Certificate of Death: Harry F. Flowers. Filed July 9, 1928. Certificate Number 72733. Department of Health, Pennsylvania. Informant: Rachel H. Flowers. [Accessed by Ancestry.com] Ancestry.com. Pennsylvania, Death Certificates, 1906-1967 [database on-line]. Provo, UT.

⁶⁹ “United States Veterans Administration Pension Payment Cards, 1907-1933,” Rachel H. Flowers in entry for Harry F. Flowers, FamilySearch.org, (accessed December 2019); Cumberland County Index to Deeds (Grantee Book EF 1750-1950, pages 267 and 283).

⁷⁰ Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 9.

City of Brotherly Love.⁷¹ In the 1930s, Philadelphians saw a city grapple with the Great Depression and New Deal's labor reforms. They watched tensions rise between Philadelphian-born and southern-born Black Americans as the city's Black population tripled during the Great Migration. They read newspaper articles on civil rights protests erupting across the city as activists fought for more funding for Black schools, integrated neighborhoods, and an increase in job opportunities. Philadelphians, both young and old, witnessed and experienced a dynamic and changing city. This was Rachel's Philadelphia.

Leaving the small, rural towns behind, Rachel and Hilda moved into the boarding home of Rodman Smith, a Black public school teacher, at 1632 North Frazier Street.⁷² They resided in a Black middle-class neighborhood in West Philadelphia, living in what Black residents called "the top," the more prosperous area above 52nd Street as opposed to the "degraded bottom."⁷³ Less than two miles away, her mother, now Nancy Sams, settled into her home with her husband and their son. This is a possible factor in Rachel's move to Philadelphia instead of returning to Maryland or remaining in Brandtsville. She desired to live closer to her mother, although Hilda still chose to live with her sister. With limited employment opportunities for Black teachers,

⁷¹ For scholarship on Jim Crow Philadelphia see Stanley Keith Arnold, *Building the Beloved Community: Philadelphia's Interracial Civil Rights Organizations and Race Relations, 1930-1970* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014); Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007); Matthew F. Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock 'n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); V. P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: A Social and Educational of Minority Community, 1900-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979); Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia*, Chapel Hill (NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Abigail Perkiss, *Making Good Neighbors: Civil Rights, Liberalism, and Integration in Postwar Philadelphia*, Ithaca (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2009).

⁷² 1930 U.S. census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, population schedule, Philadelphia, p. 3, dwelling 223, family 286, Rodman Smith; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed January 1, 2020. 1930 U.S. census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, population schedule, Philadelphia, p. 20A, dwelling 4B, family 141B, Nancy Chandler; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed January 1, 2020.

⁷³ Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 11.

Rachel secured work as a private cook. Working in the domestic sphere like many other African American women during this time, she chose a job to support herself and Hilda, who was still in high school. Although a migrant to the city, Rachel's experience differed greatly from the common Black migrant, the focus of most scholarship regarding the Great Migration. Yes, she was southern-born and a domestic laborer, but in comparison to others, Rachel could afford certain luxuries in life such as travels throughout the East Coast, extravagant parties, and a vacation home.

The summer of 1927, the *Philadelphia Tribune* began featuring Rachel in the personal notes section detailing the affairs of Black socialites in the area. Founder and editor of the *Tribune*, Christopher J. Perry, proclaimed that his newspaper was “a paper of the people and for the people . . . of no clique or class” with a purpose to “lead the masses to appreciate their best interests and to suggest the best means for attaining deserved ends.”⁷⁴ The *Tribune* today still covers the social, religious, and political history of Philadelphia's Black community, serving as a “voice” for the people. Although V. P. Franklin concluded that the *Tribune* embodied the values of upper, middle, and lower class Black Philadelphians when sharing the personal affairs and news among Black Philadelphians, only the stories of those in the upper and middle class comprised the society notes section. This section became a space for these individuals to craft and self-fashion their public image.⁷⁵ Because of this, we know about Rachel's social life in Philadelphia or at least how she wanted herself to be presented—as a traveler, a superb hostess, devout Christian, and a Black woman dedicated to school desegregation. Articles by or featuring Rachel fall under four categories—travels and events, civil rights activism, social events, and religious life.

Late in the summer of 1929, Rachel planned a road trip with local musicians and educators Louise King Motley and Ferdinand Motley III. Vincent and Hilda also joined this vacation. Departing from Philadelphia, the group traveled through the Pocono Mountains, Niagara Falls, and the Bear Mountains of New York. They even spent a few days in Toronto,

⁷⁴ V. P. Franklin, “‘Voice of the Black Community’: *The Philadelphia Tribune*, 1912-41,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 51, no. 4 (October 1984): 262-263.

⁷⁵ See Kim T. Gallon, *Pleasure in the News: African American Readership and Sexuality in the Black Press* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020.)

Canada. The article in the *Tribune* concluded, “Miss Rachel Flowers also visited friends and relatives in Harrisburg and Mechanicsburg and spent some time at their country home, ‘Greenview Dwellings.’”⁷⁶ That day news of travels, birthday parties, and weddings filled the society news section of the newspaper. Rachel probably purchased the paper, knowing she would be in it, turning to page four reading the words to her ecstatic or possibly annoyed younger sister. Perhaps even her mother read the society news section, bragging about her young daughters’ appearance and travels to friends. When not writing of her travels, Rachel appeared as a guest at several birthday parties and private dinners. Some were small like Lindsay Crawford’s bridal shower, others rather large, such as her sister’s Gladyce’s formal dinner at a local tearoom.⁷⁷ And if Rachel was not in the party, then she hosted it.

The fall of 1931 proved to be a big year for the Flowers family. That September, the *Afro-American*, a Black newspaper based in Baltimore, covered the wedding of Hilda Flowers and Herbert Wilson at the St. Augustine Church in Harrisburg. “Miss [Rachel] Flowers attended her sister as maid of honor,” the article noted, “The bride is one of the most popular of the younger set.”⁷⁸ The next month, Rachel’s sister, Gladyce, married Paul Stevenson of Philadelphia. Receiving permission from her landlord, Rodman Smith, she transformed the boarding home into “a veritable fairyland of color,” hosting a buffet supper and musical to celebrate her sisters’ marriages. With over 50 guests in attendance, various musicians (violinists, pianists, and singers) including Dorothy M. Curtis and Louise King-Motley, who Rachel traveled with on several occasions, entertained party-goers.⁷⁹

Based on the *Tribune* articles, buffet suppers were Rachel’s choice of

⁷⁶ “Return from Motor Trip,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 19, 1929.

⁷⁷ “Couple Given Shower,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 9, 1932.; “Dinner Party,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 25, 1930.

⁷⁸ “Miss Hilda Clifford Flowers, daughter of the late Harry F. Flowers, of Harrisburg and Brandtsville, and Mrs. Alexander H. Sows, of Philadelphia, became the bride of Herbert Wilson on Sunday, at the St. Augustine Church in Harrisburg. The Rev. Father Corbin officiated. The marriage was quite simple, with only a few intimate families in attendance. Miss Rachel Flowers attended her sister as maid of honor and John Jarvis, of Philadelphia, served as best man. The bride is one of the most popular of the younger set, and Mr. Wilson is a clerk in the postal service in Quaker City.” “Pat to Pansy,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), September 26, 1931.

celebration for friends. In celebration of recently married friends, Rachel entertained guests at the boarding home for Dr. Harold and Eston D. Taylor. In lieu of details surrounding the celebration, Rachel instead focused on the guests' fashion choices, beginning with her own "extremely simple red and white figured crepe frock." And of course, she ended with her sisters' choices in attire, detailing Hilda's "black crepe, a snug fitting model enhanced by shoulder straps of brilliants" and Gladyce's "black crepe gown to which touches of white chiffon lent a contrasting touch."⁸⁰ Rachel's love for fashion continued through informal talks like "Trends in Beauty Culture" at fashion showcases in the homes of Philadelphia's finest Black seamstresses.⁸¹

Rachel's events had one common theme—they were all in honor of someone. She never hosted a party for herself or a gathering just because. One of the last parties I wish to highlight points toward Rachel's support of Black teachers. Four years after a party for Harrisburg's teachers at her country home, Rachel honored Bernice Joell and Ida Tucker, schoolteachers and members of the Bermuda Union of Teachers, who were guests of a local educator. In a Halloween-themed party, the "Spook's Fantastique" required each guest to don "ghostly regalia" before entering. They then walked into the enchanting home "banked with a profusion of marigolds, chrysanthemums and autumn leaves, while from the ceiling hung black cats, jack-o'-lanterns, witches and owls."⁸² Rachel consistently surrounded herself and networked within a community of teachers. This alignment later manifested itself through organizing against the limited employment opportunities for Black teachers in Philadelphia and school segregation.⁸³

Although the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 later ruled racial segregation in public schools as unconstitutional, decades earlier, Black parents, teachers, activists, and organizations such as the National

⁷⁹ "Buffet Supper and Musicales in Honor of Newly Married Couples," *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 5, 1931.

⁸⁰ "Miss R. Flowers Gives Buffet Supper for Dr. and Mrs. D. Taylor," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 1, 1934.

⁸¹ "Something Different," *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 4, 1937.

⁸² "Spooky Party is Given for Visitors," *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 27, 1932.

⁸³ One social note read, "Miss Rachel H. Flowers has been entertaining as her guests Miss. Laura A. Brown, a teacher of the Powell School in Camden, N.J. and Mrs Halle Q. Brown . . . a teacher in the Trenton schools." Untitled, *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 5, 1932.

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Educational Equality League (EEL), protested against this injustice in Philadelphia. Yet not all Black Philadelphians were in favor of desegregation. This intra-racial conflict played out in the pages of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, a newspaper that led the battle against segregation in the city's public schools between 1925 and 1932.⁸⁴ The Philadelphia Board of Education maintained separate schools for Black and white students. Furthermore, the board restricted Black teachers' employment to Black primary schools. Despite a rising Black population, only 14 Black public elementary schools existed in the city.⁸⁵ With the *Tribune* supporting and fundraising for efforts against segregation, community members took to the paper's editorial board to express their concerns and denounce Black segregationists. From 1931-1933, the newspaper published three of Rachel's editorials supporting desegregation and condemning African Americans who supported separate Black schools.

In the city, Black schools were overcrowded, with a student to teacher ratio of 40:1, school buildings were in poor conditions, and the school board spent more on the education of white children than Black ones. As protests increased, *Tribune* editors wrote, "The public schools teach in a most effective manner what children shall think. They train white children to believe themselves superior to colored people. They instill in the minds of colored children that they are different—inferior. . . . It (sic) does its job remarkably well."⁸⁶ Though supporting desegregation, the *Tribune* covered both sides of the protest within the Black community. On September 24, 1931, local Philadelphian Jas A. Newby expressed his support of segregation. Newby argued, "Don't you think that the best interest of the Negro children is served under Negro teachers? . . . Yes, where we have a hundred and twenty and a hundred and fifty graduating high school in Philadelphia we would have a thousand or fifteen hundred if the Negro children were taught by Negro teachers."⁸⁷

⁸⁴ "V. P. Franklin explores the role of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, in ending segregation in Philadelphia public schools. See "'Voice of the Black Community,' *The Philadelphia Tribune*, 1912-41," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 51, no. 4 (Oct 1984): 261-284.

⁸⁵ V. P. Franklin, 271.

⁸⁶ "Public School: The Public's School," *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 18, 1929.

That week as Rachel read the *Tribune*, she paused at Newby's article. Perhaps she discussed it among friends and other educators. Prompted by others or by her own anger, she wrote to the *Tribune*. A month later, they published Rachel's two-column response entitled, "A System That Breeds Prejudice" in the "What Have You to Say?" editorial column. Her remarks spoke not only against Newby's statements, but also against the Philadelphia Board of Education and their acceptance of segregated schools. She wrote (an excerpt):

The theory, "the best interest of the Negro children is served under the Negro teacher," (quoting Jas A. Newby in a recent issue in this column) is all the "bunk" and only tends toward greater discrimination. On the contrary, the best interest of the American children is served under the efficient teacher, irrespective of race or color. The Negro teacher will then be given the proper place. The competent Negro will be appointed to teach, not only in colored schools, but in mixed, junior and senior high schools and colleges in Philadelphia and elsewhere.⁸⁸

Using pen and paper, Rachel cried out against the "poisonous venom of prejudice" that allowed school segregation. As for Newby, she called out what he saw as the "best interest" of Black children and supported Black teachers' employment in desegregated schools beyond the elementary level. Cooperation—one guided by sound leadership, courage, and enthusiasm—was her remedy. "Hence if we oust segregation in the school system," she wrote, "segregation as a whole is doomed."⁸⁹

Two years later, President Leslie Hill Pinckney of Cheyney State Teachers' College, now Cheyney University, suggested that Black protesters abandon their fight against segregation and not "contend for their rightful places to teach white boys and girls."⁹⁰ Rachel responded with "Negro Desires American Privileges." She began with the history of African Americans in the nation, a people "isolated by slavery." After listing the vast achievements

⁸⁷ Jas Newby, "On Negro Teachers," *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 24, 1931.

⁸⁸ Rachel H. Flowers, "What Have You to Say?: A System that Breeds Prejudice," *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 8, 1931.

⁸⁹ Rachel H. Flowers, "What Have You to Say?: A System that Breeds Prejudice."

⁹⁰ J. Robert Saxon, "Dr. Hill's Philosophy is Very Dangerous," *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 5, 1933.

by Black people, Rachel asked, “What profession is there today that the Negro is not capable of filling?” and answered, “He is optimistic, race conscious, and desires the rights and other privileges granted to other Americans.” Denouncing Hill’s comments, she dismissed his approval of what she considered “pre-Civil War isolation,” concluding her statement with two words—“Next, please?”⁹¹ As the war against segregation waged, Rachel continued to network within her social circles of Black teachers. Despite the mental toll of such a battle, she found solitude in the church and her passion for golf.

After her move to Philadelphia in the late 1920s, Rachel joined two of the first amateur Black golf clubs in the city, Fairview Golf Club and the Quaker City Golf Club. Like many activities in the Flowers family, golfing, too, became a family affair with both Gladyce and Hilda joining the Fairview Club.⁹² Meeting each Tuesday at the club’s headquarters on South Hicks Street, they prepared for golf tournaments across the East Coast and Midwest. By the 1940s, Rachel transitioned her membership to the Quaker City Golf Club. The following year proved to be a big one for her amateur golf career with features in the *Tribune*, *Afro-American*, and even the *Chicago Defender*. Making her mark at the United Golf Association’s championship, a group of professional Black golfers, in Boston she led Philadelphia’s fair sex group.⁹³ Legendary Black boxer, Joe Louis, headed the Detroit group.⁹⁴ In a “Who’s Who” around Philadelphia blurb, a local reporter featured one of Rachel’s golf tournaments in Washington, D.C. at the European Golf Association’s Mixed Scotch Foursome. He stated that “while she did not win any of the prizes she did herself proud and held her own with some of the most outstanding golfers in the east.”⁹⁵ On the golf course, she stood as a force to be reckoned with.

⁹¹ Rachel H. Flowers, “Negro Desires American Privileges,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 26, 1933.

⁹² Mabel Washington, “Fairview Golf Club Lists Girl Members,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 7, 1929.

⁹³ Per the article, Harlem Renaissance writer and clubwoman Toki Schalk hosted Rachel. “Quaker Quips,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), August 30, 1941.

⁹⁴ “Boston Ready for National Golf Championships,” *Chicago Defender*, August 9, 1941.

⁹⁵ Jim Klash, “Beautician Contest Sidelights,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 12, 1941.

Religion was also a major force in Rachel Flowers' life. Her family's faith during her childhood carried on into her adulthood. When she left for Philadelphia, Rachel only returned to Wesley AME Zion in Harrisburg for her eldest brother's, Chauncey, funeral in June 1936.⁹⁶ In her new home city, she first attended a congregation of the same name as her Harrisburg church home—Wesley AME Zion. Also attended by Gladyce, the sisters served throughout the church, singing, acting as mistresses of ceremonies, and providing faith-based lectures. As president of the women's ministry, Rachel led a host of fashion shows, Christmas pageants, and plays all featured in the *Tribune's* "Church News."⁹⁷ But once again in the 1940s, things shifted in Rachel's life. She no longer attended an AME Zion affiliated church. Instead she and Gladyce attended St. Philips Evangelical Lutheran Church, where Rachel served as director of the church's junior choir.⁹⁸

The *Tribune's* countless articles on Rachel displayed her involvement in the Philadelphia's Black community in a wide array of groups. Her membership extended to the following social organizations: Young Women's Christian Association (their drama club, the Y Players), the John Brown Memorial Association, Utopia Business and Professional Club, the Dra-Mu Opera Guild, the French Club, and Las Buenas Amigas. Charity organizations included the Philadelphia Health Council and the Quaker City Charity Club, which assisted in raising funds for Mercy Hospital, a medical facility serving Philadelphia's Black community. In addition, she was also a member of the Philadelphia chapter of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History until her death.⁹⁹

By the 1950s, Rachel's name rarely appeared in the *Tribune*. Again, an unexplainable shift occurred in her life—a move to Brooklyn, New York. Only two articles spoke about Rachel in this city, noting her memberships in the National Council of Negro Women and the John Brown Memorial

⁹⁶ "World War Veteran Dies in Harrisburg," *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 20, 1936.

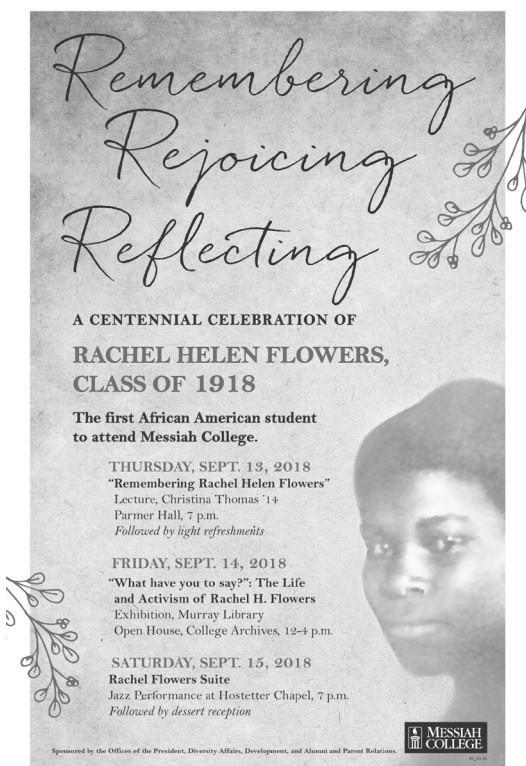
⁹⁷ "Mother's Day Program at Wesley Church," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 19, 1932'; "Church Choir in Xmas Morning Play," *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 2, 1936.

⁹⁸ "St. Philips Lutheran," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 3, 1948.

⁹⁹ Established in 1915 by "Father of Black History," Carter G. Woodson, the "Negro History Association" formed to educate African Americans about their history and to promote the study of the field. See Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 32.

Association where she served as vice president.¹⁰⁰ In New York City, she married Wilson Ellerbee (1901-1974).¹⁰¹ The couple returned to Philadelphia by the 1960s. Already selling the family's home in Brandtsville, Rachel remained in Philadelphia until her death in 1988.¹⁰² Despite past news articles concerning her parties or even absences from events, neither Rachel's wedding nor her death made the *Tribune* news—only her continued devotion to Black history organizations in the 1970s.¹⁰³ In December 1979, the *Tribune* published Rachel's last featured article. From the organization of which she was a member the longest—the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History—she received the Distinguished Citizen Award alongside civil rights activists, ministers, and educators at the organizations' 50th anniversary celebration in Philadelphia.¹⁰⁴

While I was conducting research for this article in the Messiah University Archives, a student assistant introduced himself to me. After I told him



Poster announcing centennial event honoring Rachel Flowers. Image courtesy of Messiah University.

¹⁰⁰ "NCNW Meets at Y," *The New York Age* (New York, New York), October 14, 1950; Untitled, *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 21, 1956.

¹⁰¹ Mabel Washington, "Fairview Golf Club Lists Girl Members," *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 7, 1929.

¹⁰² Per the article, Harlem Renaissance writer and clubwoman Toki Schalk hosted Rachel. "Quaker Quips," *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), August 30, 1941.

¹⁰³ "Boston Ready for National Golf Championships," *Chicago Defender*, August 9, 1941.

¹⁰⁴ Jim Klash, "Beautician Contest Sidelights," *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 12, 1941.

about my research, he mentioned that he was a R. H. Flowers Scholar.¹⁰⁵ It amazes me today how well-known Rachel is within the Messiah College community. When I first began this research in 2012, I simply wanted to explore and honor the life of the first Black student to attend the institution, an alumna whose name became known only three years prior. Most recently in 2018, Messiah University celebrated a three-day centennial celebration marking a century after her graduation from the institution. This event featured a re-performance of the Rachel Flowers Suite, a keynote lecture, and other events across campus.¹⁰⁶ A year prior, the college also honored Rachel by renaming the Amigo Peer Mentoring Scholars Program the R. H. Flowers Scholars Program, and in 2017, they welcomed their first class of R. H. Flowers Scholars. If it were not for HieraId Edgardo Osorto's research and his interest in the school's past, Rachel's name would have remained unknown. Rachel has begun to receive her long overdue flowers.

This biography is by no means comprehensive, and although we know more about the first African American student to attend Messiah University, there is still much to learn about Rachel's life. But what we know is that Rachel anchored her life in activism, in the church, and in Philadelphia's Black community not only organizing, but entertaining. As a former educator, she aligned herself with Black teachers pushing against the limited employment opportunities before them. She spoke out against segregated schools in Philadelphia, a city many African Americans migrated to in promise of a better life for themselves and their children. She participated in community organizations that honored abolitionists and Black leaders, spread Black knowledge and history, and embraced Black beauty.

Again it puzzles me that Rachel was widely mentioned in newspapers over even the most minor details concerning her life—an illness, her attendance at meetings, and even her role as Naomi in a church play—but

¹⁰⁵ The R.H. Flowers Scholars Program “exists to foster awareness of domestic racial matters and ethnic identity development in program participants to better prepare them for reconciliation work in the church and society.” It was formerly the Amigo Peer Mentoring Program. R. H. Flowers Scholars, First Year Program Handbook, 2019-2020, https://www.messiah.edu/download/downloads/id/6023/Scholars_Handbook_2019___FY_Flowers.pdf

¹⁰⁶ The Rachel Flowers Suite is a jazz production of Rachel's life composed by W. Roy Mitchell (Corry, PA: Chartmeister Music Publishing, 2014) and originally performed under the conduction of William Stowman and the Messiah College Jazz Ensemble at Messiah College in 2014.

there is no mention of her marriage, her work in the National Alliance of Postal Workers, or even her death. Even at Messiah, neither Rachel nor her brother, who passed in 2001, were honored during their lifetimes. But now we can remember and celebrate. When I return to images of Rachel, I pause, speculating about her time at Messiah and her life thereafter. I wonder why it took us so long to study her life. But I also smile because she was here, waiting in the archives the entire time.

During my keynote lecture at the Rachel Flowers Centennial Celebration, I closed the talk with an obituary I wrote in Rachel's honor. I saw it unfit that no known obituary graced any newspapers or alumni newsletter. So, I close this article with it.

Rachel Helen Ellerbee of Philadelphia passed away on October 3, 1988. Formerly known as the Miss Rachel H. Flowers, she was born on August 2, 1900 in Jacksonville, Florida to Harry Flowers and Nancy Sawyer. At age 13, she moved with her family to Brandtsville, Pennsylvania, graduating from Boiling Springs High School. In 1916, she enrolled at Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home in Grantham, Pennsylvania. She was the first African American student to attend this institution graduating in 1918. Beginning her career as a public school teacher in Maryland, she later moved to the City of Brotherly Love in the late 1920s. There, she joined several organizations including the Philadelphia Chapter of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Deeply troubled by the forms of Jim Crow that plagued the city, Rachel also became involved in an early civil rights movement fighting against school segregation in Philadelphia.

She was a member of St. Philips Lutheran Evangelical Church where she served as the director of the junior choir. She will be remembered for her advocacy for Black children and teachers and her commitment to Black history. Rachel was preceded in death by her husband, Wilson Ellerbee, her parents, Harry and Nancy, her siblings, Henry Sams, Mary, Chauncey, Fred, Theodore, Gladyce, and Hilda. She is survived [at the time of her death] by two brothers, Vincent Flowers of Philadelphia and John Flowers of White Plains, NY, a number of nieces and nephews, and close family friends. We honor her life, her activism, and her dedication to civil rights.

THOMAS: Life of Rachel Flowers

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