

# FLORIDA RUFFIN RIDLEY



Florida Ruffin Ridley was a local African-American activist, suffragist, teacher, writer, and editor. Born on January 29, 1861 in Boston, Ridley attended Boston schools and was educated at Boston Teacher's College and Boston University. She was the one of the first African-American teachers in Massachusetts and taught at the Grant School in Boston.

Ridley and her husband, Ulysses Ridley, were longtime residents of Brookline, purchasing a home at 131 Kent Street in 1896 and living there until the early 1920s. Both of her children attended Lawrence School and graduated from Brookline High School, with her son being named Valedictorian in 1918. According to research done by Ken Liss, President of the Brookline Historical Society, Mr. and Mrs. Ridley were likely the first African-American homeowners in Brookline. Ridley was also a co-founder of the Unitarian Church on Sewall Avenue.

Ridley exemplifies the postwar generation of African-American intellectuals who continued to fight against prejudice and worked to establish justice for all people. Ridley was involved in the women's suffrage movement in the 1920s. She co-founded Society for the Collection of Negro Folklore and several other non-profit organizations, including the National Association of Colored Women Clubs (NACWC) to preserve black culture and history. She was active in the New Era Club as well as in the League of Women for Community Service. She also became a member of several predominantly white clubs, including the Twentieth Century Club and the Women's City Club of Boston. As a journalist, she edited *The Woman's Era*, the first newspaper written by and for African American women. She became involved in both the women's suffrage movement and the anti-lynching movement. Through this work, she hoped to connect an understanding of history with social justice work. She believed all races deserved an equal place in society.

Florida Ruffin Ridley's work as a journalist, short story writer, and historian helped people recognize the contributions of African-Americans in Massachusetts life and the continued existence of prejudice in Boston, a city well known for its abolitionist movement. One example is her 1926 short story, "Two Gentlemen in Boston" that provided insight into the life of an African-American family living in the early twentieth century in a primarily white, Northern neighborhood. The story described the subtleties of racism's effect on a young boy and how he responded.

She was also an important player in the community of African-American intellectuals and leaders who were connected by friendship, activism, artistic and literary accomplishments, political activism, and a commitment to social justice. Ridley was a primary member of the activist circle that included Maria Baldwin, Rachel Benson West, Pauline Hopkins, Bessie and Maud Trotter, and Dorothy West and was instrumental in bringing the thinking, culture, and arts of the Harlem Renaissance north to Boston.

## Sources:

"African-Americans in Brookline: Seeking the First Homeowner" by Ken Liss. May 29, 2012. *Retrieved from Muddy River Musings.*

"Beacon Hill" 2019. *Retrieved from The Boston Woman's Heritage Trail.*

Excerpts from "Standing Before Us: Unitarian Universalist Women and Social Reform, 1776-1936" by Dorothy May Emerson. 2000. *Retrieved from Google Books.*

Excerpts from "Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History" by Rodger Streitmatter. January 13, 2015. *Retrieved from Google Books.*

Excerpts from "Literary Sisters: Dorothy West and her Circle, a Biography of the Harlem Renaissance" by Verner Mitchell and Cynthia Davis. October 18, 2011. *Retrieved from Google Books.*

Excerpts from "Black Firsts: 4,000 Ground-Breaking and Pioneering Historical Events" by Jessie Carney Smith. December 1, 2012. *Retrieved from Google Books.*