

RUTH BATSON



Ruth Batson was born on August 3, 1921, in Roxbury, Massachusetts to Jamaican immigrants. Growing up, Batson attended the Everett School and graduated from Boston Latin Academy. In 1940, Batson married her husband, John Batson, and raised three daughters who all attended school in Boston.

The lack of educational reform and the growing decline of Boston schools led Batson to run for School Committee in 1951. Although she was not elected, her campaign resulted in a partnership with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and increased her involvement in politics. Batson volunteered to work for John F. Kennedy's office during his first campaign for the Senate, and again when he ran for president in 1960. During this time, Batson was also elected president of the NAACP New England Regional Conference. In 1964, Batson became the first African-American woman to be elected to the Democratic National Committee.

During the Civil Rights movement, Batson formally accused the Boston School Committee of enforcing "de facto segregation" within their schools. She organized a series of marches, protests, and boycotts with urban and suburban families to raise public awareness of the issue. Her efforts led to the creation of the Racial Imbalance Act of 1965, which penalized schools by withholding state and federal funding if they remained segregated and unequal.

At the same time, Batson and fellow parent Ellen Jackson established the beginnings of the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) Program, arranging transportation for students in Boston to attend schools in neighboring suburban districts with open seats. Support from Brookline, Newton, Wellesley, Arlington, Braintree, Lincoln, and Lexington Public Schools soon followed. In 1966, with Brookline as a charter community, the METCO program was officially established with federal grant funding and legislation that supported open enrollment. As their executive director, Batson expanded the program to transport over 1000 children to 28 communities in Massachusetts.

In 1969, Batson stepped down from METCO to establish the Ruth M. Batson Educational Foundation, which awards grants to African-American students, educational institutions, and community organizations. Batson worked as an associate professor at the Boston University School of Medicine from 1970 to 1986 and was also the executive director of the Museum of African-American History in Boston from 1986 to 1989.

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ROLAND HAYES



Roland Hayes was born on June 3, 1887, in Curryville, Georgia to tenant farmers. After his father's death at age 11, Hayes' mother moved her family to Chattanooga, where Hayes first began taking singing lessons during a chance encounter with the church choir director. His musical talent eventually led him to enroll at Fisk University in 1905, where he joined an African-American a cappella ensemble known as the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

In 1911, Hayes eventually settled in Boston after a tour stop with the group, working various jobs to support his singing lessons. Over the next few years, he released several recordings and toured with different groups, culminating in a sold-out solo concert at Symphony Hall in 1917 that he had organized himself.

Frustrated by the lack of opportunity in the United States, Hayes traveled to London in 1920. His performance at Wigmore Hall a year later was warmly received and led to several engagements with European royalty and other high profile performances. In 1922, Hayes returned to Boston and became the first African-American to perform with a major symphony orchestra. During this time, he maintained a residence in Brookline and bought the 600-acre farm in Curryville, where his mother formerly worked as a slave.

Hayes continued to tour the United States and Europe until the 1940s, earning praise for his interpretation of classical German and French songs and renditions of Negro folk songs and spirituals. These performances have been credited with breaking the color barrier on the classical music stage. He was awarded the Spingarn Medal for outstanding achievement by an African-American by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1924.

By the 1950s, Hayes performed sparingly, instead opting to mentor young professional singers such as Paul Robeson, Marian Anderson, and Leontyne Price and teach voice lessons at Boston College. In 1962, Hayes gave his farewell concert at Carnegie Hall to celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday and raise funds for the American Missionary Association College Centennials Fund. Following his death in 1977, Hayes was inducted posthumously into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame in 1991.

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SYBIL HOLMES



Born in West Bridgewater, MA, Sybil Holmes moved to Brookline where she became a lawyer specializing in contracts, automobile insurance, industrial accidents, and probate law. Admitted to the Massachusetts bar in 1911 at the age of 21, she became the youngest woman lawyer in the United States. She was elected president of the Massachusetts Association of Women Lawyers in 1919.

Holmes first began her political career as a Brookline Town Meeting member. She was also a member of the committee that reviewed appropriations and articles on the annual Town Meeting warrant, now known as the Town's Advisory Committee. She was an active member of the Massachusetts Republican Party and the Brookline Republican Town Committee. From 1930 to 1934, Holmes served as an assistant attorney general for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In 1936, she became the first woman elected to the Massachusetts State Senate. Holmes served for two years as a representative of the Town of Brookline.

In 1937 and 1938, Holmes chaired the state's Special Commission to Investigate the Activities within the Commonwealth of Communistic, Fascistic, Nazi and other Subversive Organizations. The work of the commission included interrogating people suspected of being Nazis, communists, or "anti-religious," and publishing a 559 page report that implicated members of the American Civil Liberties Union, labor activists, and members of local churches. The report also named specific individuals as being communists, resulting in repercussions for those individuals and the organizations and businesses with which they were connected.

Holmes, apparently influenced by the commission's proceedings, introduced a number of bills aimed at slowing the perceived rapid spread of communism. The most prominent of these bills called for the establishment of "a division of citizenship" based on a person's political views or activities and the formation of an ongoing commission that would identify such "subversives." While these bills were ultimately defeated, they did serve to introduce the notion of a division of citizenship and stronger sedition laws, and the commission itself was a precursor to the federal government's House Committee on Un-American Activities that would begin in 1938. Due in part to Holmes involvement on the commission and the bills she sponsored, she was not re-elected.

She served as the recorder of the Massachusetts Land Court from 1948 until 1959 and ran unsuccessfully for state treasurer and Boston City Councilor.

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FLORIDA RUFFIN RIDLEY



Florida Ruffin Ridley was an African-American civil rights 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 second African American teacher 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. 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.

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