In our Intro to Race in America class, we are doing research on a very interesting family from around the Richmond and Berea area. This family is called the Mackey family, and their family history still continues today. The person that I am researching is Ms. Ada Gorne Mackey. Ada was born on April 16, 1880 and died on December 15, 1945. Ada Mackey was a school teacher in the city of Berea until she died of the age of 65 due to a house fire. She was inside the house when it was burning and was believed to have died because of too much smoke inhalation.

Miss Ada was never married and had no children. She did have two brothers still living after her death and her parents were not divorced or separated. According to her death certificate her father was Joel Mackey, but in the manuscript her it says her father was Joseph Mackey. Her mother was named Marguerite Mackey. Joseph Mackey was a Republican and former slave. Soon after his freedom, he ran for postmaster in the city of Richmond and some information is unknown on her mother. She had two brothers: Charles Mackey and Virgil Mackey. Charles and Virgil were both well respected tailors who had a very successful business in town (according to an African American Newspaper article). Virgil also enlisted for the military in 1918. Miss Ada attended Berea College from the years 1897 to 1898. Back then, Berea College was a very diverse college and did not see color as a problem. The cultural differentiation was much greater here but that did not stop people from getting along like it should everywhere. The Berea College motto is “God Has Made of One Blood all People of the Earth”, and that is why I believe many African Americans attended here, including a majority from the rest of the Mackey family. It is believed that Ada attended the Normal School. One question I have, what is the difference between a normal school and an academy during that time period?

A Normal School department is devoted to the education for people who wanted to major in education to become teachers. The normal students had all the resources that the regular people had such as the college library, lecture courses, and the music department but they also had stuff that the regular students didn’t receive. Normal students had the opportunity to do practice teachings in the Model schools, which were almost like Elementary schools today. Also
they had a different class schedule from each other. An academy may have certain classes that a normal school doesn’t offer. For example, an academy might offer astronomy or psychology, but Ada took classes like spelling, penmanship, and English grammar while in the normal school.

Ada did not graduate from Berea though. Due to the Day Law, she transferred to Fisk University, on all black school, and was also in the normal school there. But in this time period people did not have money to just send their kids off to a college in a different state. How could she afford it? Although they weren’t in the same Social class as white people, they still were doing better than most families. Her parents both were well educated and had decent jobs which provided the tuition for her to receive her education just like they did. Based on Ada’s grades, she was an A and B type student. Due to the fact of Ethnic Stratification, the only job she could find was a teaching job in the city of Richmond. If she were white instead of African American, she had the potential and the intelligence to become something better such as a professor or a teacher at a bigger and better school. Its things like this that caused her to move away from her home and to have to attend Fisk University. The correct term for this type of behavior is called Paternalism. Paternalism is the concept that the dominant group (white people) controlled the subordinate group (African Americans) to maintain societal order. An example of this would be not allowing Berea College to function with whites and blacks together.

It is hard to imagine what life would be like living how the Mackey family and other African American families did. It is also cruel and harsh how they got treated. By the time Ada was born, slavery had already ended but the bad treatment and harassment never stopped and still has not stopped in some cases today. But that did not stop the Mackey family from being successful and overcoming those hardships and rough times that they had. Ada went to school and become something of herself and got the education that she wanted and needed to do this.
Citations


