

### ***In the Archives with Berlinda Davidson.***

You probably have never heard of this woman. Not one of the volunteers working in the archive inventory project had. Yet, there was her handwritten name on many of the musical scores and sheet music in the archive. Clearly, she played piano well, or at least sufficiently well to play classical music. Dated 1919 and 1920, she would be an early 20<sup>th</sup> century San Franciscan.

Thanks to Shawna Sherman, manager of the African American Center at the San Francisco Public Library, main branch, we now know who this distinguished woman was! On a webpage at the University of California, Berkeley, website, we find photos of her as a 1919 U.C.B. graduate and on the cover of the *Crisis*, August 1922.

In this brief article, it is noted that she was the first Negro graduate from the Nome, Alaska white high school in 1912; she went on to the University of California, Berkley, earning her AB degree in 1919 and a MA in Education in 1922 (she may have been the first Negro woman to earn the distinction of receiving a MA degree there). The title of her thesis, was “Educational Status of the Negro of the San Francisco Bay Region”. She taught mathematics and science at the Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute.

In 1915, she married Edward Mabsen\*, noted African American lawyer, who was instrumental in the founding of the local NAACP branch in San Francisco. Davidson-Mabsen was NAACP president in 1942. Stuart Davidson, Berlinda’s brother, was the first African American to graduate from the University of California Medical School in 1918 and served in WWI. The Society also holds an item related to brother, Davidson, not yet inventoried. Berlinda died in 1974.

In this brief webpage article, there is no mention of her social life (was she involved in a church? the “Community Center”? the budding civil rights movement? Was she a member of the Society at one point?) nor did it mention that she had been a pianist (and singer) who traveled to Europe sometime in her youth, as assumed from other items compiled with the sheet music. The sheet music has yet to be inventoried; it is in poor condition, demonstrating that it was used by Davidson and others in her home, likely kept in a piano bench. However, this treasure trove brought attention to a forgotten, distinguished African American woman and her accomplishments. More story to come!

To read the entire article, click on [Berlinda Davidson Mabsen](#)

Ginger Smyly

\*Edward Mabsen, or “Attorney Mabsen” was already known to the writer of this article, appearing early in the history of the Booker T. Washington Community Service Center. The second edition of 100 Years in Action: Booker T. Washington Community Service Center was self-published by the author early this year.

