

## Reader Recollection: Abbie Robinson Schaudies one of many to stayed to help during yellow fever outbreak

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Wylheme H. Ragland Special to *The Decatur Daily* Section: Opportunity



Abbie Robinson Schaudies and daughter Tulie Ophelia in a photo commissioned by Samuel Schaudies. COURTESY PHOTO

relatives as far away as the Eastern Seaboard and the District of Columbia, and, yet, they agreed they would not leave their church, family and friends.

Abbie Robinson was born in the Twickenham neighborhood of Huntsville. Her parents were Martha Roots, an enslaved octoroon (a person who is one-eighth black by descent) from New Orleans, and John Robinson, a freeman of color. John Robinson's manumission resolution was approved by the 1828 Alabama Legislature meeting in Tuscaloosa. Robinson and her enslaver ensured that Abbie was taught to read, write and acquire social skills for her job as nurse and companion to the wealthy women of Twickenham. The 1865 Census Report completed by the Freedmen's Bureau listed Abbie and her occupation before the Civil War as nurse.

A Kentucky newspaper reported on Sept. 20, 1878, the following: "The people of Decatur stampeded today on account of yellow fever. ... Not more than two hundred out of a population of one thousand remain ... things look gloomy ... ."

Many families did leave the town. However, many of the members of St. Paul Methodist Episcopal Church (now King's Memorial United Methodist Church), when it was located at Market Street and Oak Street, decided to remain. Many of the men remained to assist with patrols and burials. The women who remained would not leave their husbands and remained to care for the orphans, sick and the living.

One of the women who remained and helped organize the women in Old Town was Abbie Robinson Schaudies. According to her maternal granddaughter, Athelyne Celest Banks, during the 1878 Yellow Fever epidemic, Abbie and her family had

After the Civil War, Abbie Robinson married Samuel Schaudies on March 10, 1870, in Huntsville. His occupation was listed as shoemaker. By 1871, the couple had moved to Decatur and their daughter, Tulie Ophelia, was born in the Schaudies Cottage in 1873 (known today as the Schaudies-Banks Cottage). Samuel celebrated the birth of his daughter by commissioning a portrait of his wife and daughter.

Decatur after Reconstruction was a city of opportunity, and Samuel enjoyed a bustling shoe/boot-making and repair business and advertised his business in one of the local newspapers. The Decatur News, Nov. 23, 1878, listed the following advertisement: "Boot and Shoe Maker, Decatur, Alabama, Opposite the Post Office: Having learned his trade thoroughly under F.O. Schaudies of Huntsville, (Frederick Otto Schaudies) ... . He uses Lyons Patent Heel Stiffeners to prevent boots and shoes from running over. He uses none but the very best material, guarantees satisfaction in every particular, and respectfully solicits public patronage."

When the epidemic struck Decatur, Samuel Schaudies was busy building a profitable shoe-making business, and his wife was busy with works of charity in the church and community. Included in her charity work, she also was active in St. Paul Methodist Episcopal Church's Ladies Aid Society. The Ladies Aid Society's mission was to care for the aged, orphans and the sick. During 1878, this society was somewhat prepared for the epidemic because of their previous work. In addition to Abbie, women in the society also included Eliza Walden Banks, Lydia Sibley Hill, Lucinda Moseley, Ella McDonald and Charity Rather.

Tulie Ophelia Schaudies Banks was 5 years old during the epidemic and she would share countless stories with her daughter Athelyne Banks regarding the acts of kindness by the women of Old Town. Athelyne Banks' mother would remind her that one of the family's mottos was "much is required of those who have." Many of the women were married to husbands who were artisans, landowners and former union soldiers, and they formed the middle class of Old Town.

Under Abbie's leadership, women from First Baptist Church, Colored, (now First Missionary Baptist Church) when it was located at Market Street and Canal Street, were enlisted to serve as nurses with the St. Paul women. Some of the women from the Baptist church included Louisa Reeves Allen, Addie Garth, Sarah McCartney, Susan McCartney and Agnes Thompson.

Regardless of race or social class, orphans were cared for until other arrangements could be made for their care, and meals were prepared for the physicians, patrolmen and burial details. The women performed their duties to the community and still took time to care for their respective families.

With assistance from neighboring counties and financial assistance from former Decatur residents, like Union Army Capt. Ethan Osborn Hurd, the women were able to meet the needs of the community.

There were many unsung heroes during 1878, and Abbie Robinson Schaudies and the many women who remained are a testament to the solid foundation of support by church and family in our community.

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