

The Residence of Alice McClellan Birney

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The following paper was prepared under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Dickey at Kennesaw State University for an Introduction to Public History course.

The Residence of Alice McClellan Birney (1872-1884) historical marker is located on Kennesaw Avenue in Marietta, Georgia. It is in front of the house in which Birney lived from ages fourteen to 26. This marker was erected by the Georgia Historical Commission in 1953 to commemorate Birney and her role as co-founder of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, the organization that is known today as the Parent Teacher Association. The National Congress of Mothers was founded “to give fathers and mothers the opportunity to better educate themselves for intelligent home-making and child-nurture.”ⁱ Birney remained the organization’s president until 1902, when she had to step down due to health problems. After resigning, she remained active in the organization for the five years leading up to her death. Birney also published a book entitled *Childhood*, which was a compilation of the articles she wrote regarding child-rearing during this time.

After her family moved to Atlanta, Georgia, Birney attended and graduated from a private high school at age fifteen. She attended Mount Holyoke Seminary in Massachusetts for one year before returning home to marry her first husband, Alonzo J. White, Jr. He died a year later, leaving her a widow with their only child. Suffering from her loss, she moved back to Atlanta to live with her mother. Birney’s interest in child welfare and the quality of children’s education was sparked by her mother’s involvement in her own education. The lack of resources available to Birney, as a mother, motivated her to create these resources for other parents. It was not until five years after her second marriage that she founded the National Congress of Mothers.

It was important to Birney that the Congress was “open to all regardless of race, religion, or social standing.”ⁱⁱ

The house in which Birney and her family resided was built before she and her family lived there. After the family moved out, the St. James Episcopal Church purchased the house in 1887 to use as a rectory. The house itself holds significance because it is the house that Birney lived in when she was a maturing adolescent and young adult.

The importance of Birney’s work regarding the involvement of parents in their children’s education has been commemorated across the nation. Many schools across the country have been named in her honor for her work and dedication towards creating the National Congress of Mothers.

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¹ Frederic Schoff. "The National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 67 (1916) pp. 140.

ⁱⁱ Edward T. James, Janet Wilson. James, and Paul Boyer, *Notable American Women: 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*(Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).