

# Historical Context

## The Pope Family

Manassa Thomas Pope was born near Rich Square, Northampton County, North Carolina, in 1858. His parents, Permilia Hall and Jonas Elias Pope, were free people of color, and the family may have been free as early as the eighteenth century. Dr. Pope's father, Jonas Elias Pope, was a carpenter by trade and owned a significant amount of land in Northampton and Bertie Counties. He was considered by some the wealthiest Black man in Northampton County. He was described as having a "bright yellow complexion," indicating his multi-racial heritage.



Figure 1: Pope Family on the front porch, ca. 1915



Figure 2 Pope family homestead near Northampton County, 1959

Manassa Pope came to Raleigh in 1874 to attend Shaw University, which was established by a white minister, Henry Martin Tupper, in 1865. He finished his undergraduate education and then

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began studying at the Leonard School of Medicine at Shaw University, the first four-year medical college in the United States. Dr. Pope graduated in 1886, and in 1887, he married Lydia Walden of Winton, NC.



Figure 3 Shaw Medical School, Class of 1886

The Popes moved to Henderson, NC in 1888, where Dr. Pope served as assistant postmaster until they moved to Charlotte in 1892. In Charlotte, Dr. Pope not only practiced medicine but was a very active businessman, helping to

establish the Queen City Drug Company and the People's Benevolent Association

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1898, Dr Pope enlisted in the army for the Spanish-American War and was commissioned as the first lieutenant and first assistant surgeon in the Third Regiment. After mustering out in 1899, Dr. Pope moved to Raleigh. In Raleigh, he established his medical practice on East Hargett Street, which was rapidly becoming the central Black business district.

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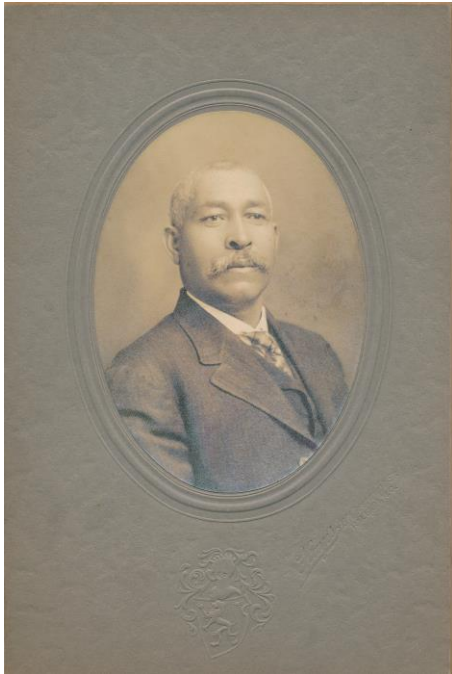


Figure 4 Dr. Pope, ca. 1910

In 1901, he had a substantial brick residence at 511 South Wilmington Street. Who designed or constructed Dr. Pope's house is unknown, but many architectural features can be found in other Raleigh neighborhoods of the period. It is assumed that the bricks of the Pope house came from a demolished warehouse on the property before the house was built. The house was originally a two-story, two-bedroom house

with one bathroom upstairs. The interior finishes were restrained but elegant, including darkly varnished wood trim, doors, and floors, an impressive staircase, and a simple but attractive stained glass window in the front hall. Dr. Pope had installed the latest technology in his home, including combination gas and electric fixtures, a kitchen with running water, coal-burning heating stoves, and even a telephone.

In 1906, Lydia Walden Pope died of tuberculosis. In 1907, Dr. Pope married Delia Haywood Phillips, who was born in 1880 and thus twenty-two years his junior. Though Delia's parents were both born into slavery, her family was very prominent in the area. She, too, came from a multi-racial background, and both of her parents were educated. The couple had two daughters: Evelyn B. Pope, born in 1908, and Ruth P. Pope,

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born in 1910.



Figure 5 Evelyn (left) and Ruth (right) with an unknown childhood friend (middle), date unknown

Despite being strict Baptists, Dr. and Mrs. Pope seemed to have been thoroughly “modern” parents where their daughters were concerned. They freely discussed all issues with them and strongly encouraged them to pursue higher education. Both daughters received degrees from Shaw University, and both earned Master’s degrees from Columbia University in New York; Evelyn in library science, and Ruth in home economics. Dr. Pope died in 1934 at 76, and his wife followed him in 1955. Evelyn was by then a

respected librarian at the North Carolina Central University Law School, and Ruth was a beloved home economics teacher in the Chapel Hill public schools. Neither of the two sisters ever married. They kept the family home in Raleigh and retired there in the 1970s. Evelyn died in 1995, and Ruth passed away in October 2000.



Figure 6 Picture of Evelyn (seated right) and Ruth (seated left), 1958

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