



Alice McLellan Birney

From A Woman's Place: 52 Women from Cobb County Georgia, 1850-1981.

By Janet M. Milliard and the Cobb Marietta Girls Club, 1981, p. 16.

Alice Birney, the co-founder of what today has become the Parent-Teachers Association, felt that adults could ruin the minds of children.

"Allie" was born on Winters Street in Marietta on October 19, 1858 to L. C. McLellan and Harriet Tatum. She grew up in the home on the corner of Church Street and Kennesaw Avenue (the house was later moved to Kennesaw Avenue to make way for a church parking lot). Miss McLellan attended the Marietta Female Academy, finished high school in Atlanta, and she worked in her mother's bonnet shop before studying for one year at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. Her interest in education was demonstrated in a two-room school on Hayes Street in Marietta.

Alice McLellan married Alonzo White, a Charleston lawyer, and while in South Carolina, gave birth to a daughter. When Mr. White died suddenly, Alice returned to Marietta. After living a short time in New York selling advertising, she moved to Atlanta with her recently widowed mother. Alice was known for her lectures on dress reform and she toured the South, discussing the harmful effects of corsets and bustles. In Atlanta, as a young working mother, she kept active with theatrical and musical performances and "Allie" was remembered as

having a beautiful voice, playing the piano, riding horses and mastering tennis.

In the winter of 1892, Alice married Theodore Birney, an attorney, and moved to Washington D. C., where two daughters were born. As the mother of three children, she became interested in readings of psychology and philosophy and she felt the need to advance the field of childhood education. Mrs. Birney authored many articles for newspapers and periodicals on topics including infant feeding and how to keep a boarding house.

Frequently in the Washington, D.C. spotlight, Alice Birney was instrumental in joining together two thousand women in the nation's capital on February 17, 1897, for the National Congress of Mothers. Received at the White House for their efforts, the delegates formed the first P. T.A. . . .

Mrs. Birney served as President for the National Congress of Mothers until 1902. In her later years, while suffering from cancer, she wrote and published essays on child rearing, which were published in 1905 in the book entitled *Childhood*. Two years later on December 20, 1907, at the age of 49 she died. . . . There is no doubt that her impact on education and family life across the nation has been significant.