**Dr. Eugene Gray Covington (1872-1929)**

Dr. E. G. Covington was the first established and successful African American medical doctor in Bloomington-Normal, serving the Black, as well as the white, community. Not only was he a gifted and sought-after physician and surgeon - a healer of physical ailments - but he also sought to aggressively treat the social, economic, and emotional wounds endured by African Americans in the post-Civil War era. He was more-than-willing to devote his time, energy, intelligence, leadership capabilities, gift of self-expression, and abundance of moxie to champion a number of causes critical to the advancement of social justice in the cities. He was a frequent committeeperson (often selected as chair), organized numerous events, accepted writing and speaking invitations, and even entered politics to improve the lives of Black residents. Somehow, he managed a work/cause/life balance, filling the role of dedicated and supportive husband, father, and son.

Eugene Gray Covington was born in Rappahannock County, Virginia on August 1, 1872.[1] His parents were Joseph (1835–ca. 1904) and Elizabeth (Holmes) Covington (1852–1922), who were both born into slavery in Virginia. Little is known of the life of Joseph, only his approximate year and place of birth, and his occupation. He was listed in the *1880 U.S. Census* as a "laborer." Elizabeth was born August 1, 1852, to Lindsey and Adelphia Tolliver Holmes.[2] Joseph Covington and Elizabeth Holmes were married June 4, 1868, when he was 33 and she was 15.] According, again, to the *1880 U.S. Census*, Eugene had an older sister, Mary E., born ca. 1870, and a younger brother, James, born ca. 1874. Since no corroborating records appear to exist on the siblings, it is likely that, if they did exist, they died in childhood.[3]

Sometime before 1904, possibly following Joseph's death, Elizabeth moved to Bloomington to be near her only son, making her home at 504 N. Prairie Street.[4] At the time of her death from Bright's Disease on July 19, 1922, she lived with Eugene and his family. She was well thought of – some might say, beloved - in the Bloomington area. According to her obituary, she was "more familiarly known as 'Mother Covington.'" She was described as "an ardent church worker, in all phases of church work. Fifty-five years of her life were devoted to church work . . ."[5]

Not surprising, considering his destiny, Eugene was a precocious child whose high-test scores led the principal of his segregated elementary school in Virginia to recommend his transfer to a local Catholic school. Although the Covingtons were not Catholic, he attended the school and continued to excel in his studies. After completing his formative education in 1895, he went on to study medicine at Howard University, a historically Black college in Washington, D.C.[6] He completed his residency at Freedman's Hospital located across the street from Howard and graduated with his M.D. degree in 1899. He was licensed that same year to practice allopathic (conventional) medicine.[7]

According to family lore, Dr. Covington's formal education didn't end at Howard. His son Eugene Jr. related in a 1992 interview, that his father earned a graduate degree in gynecology

---

[1] *Directory of Deceased American Physicians, 1804-1929*, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com.
[2] Covington, Eugene G., *Ancestry Family Trees*, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com.
[3] *United States Federal Census* Year: 1880.
[4] *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1904*. (Bloomington: Pantagraph Printing and Stationary Co.), 151.
[5] "Mrs. E. Covington is Taken by Death," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 20 July 1922, pg. 3.
[6] John Muirhead, *A History of African Americans in McLean County, Illinois 1835-1975*, Bloomington: McLean County Historical Society, 1998, pg. 31.
[7] *Directory of Deceased American Physicians, 1804-1929*, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com.

and obstetrics from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where he also played quarterback on the football team. Eugene Jr. further claimed that Fred Young, a long-time local sports columnist, wrote an article about his father's football career for *The Pantagraph.* According to Eugene Jr. Young stated in the article that quarterback Covington led Northwestern to victory against Bloomington's Illinois Wesleyan University.[8] While it is possible that Northwestern was on IWU's football schedule at that time, there is no record that Covington attended the university or played football.

In order to support himself through college, Covington spent the summers waiting tables at a restaurant in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York.[9] It was there that, through a friend who was also a waiter, he met his future wife, Alice Alena Lewis (1879–1925) of Oswego, New York. They were married in Oswego on September 10, 1902. Eugene and Alice had three children who survived to adulthood: Girard (1904–1957), Eugene Jr. (1910–2004), and Joseph (1913–1977).[10] They also had one or two daughters that died in infancy.[11]

Dr. Covington moved to Bloomington sometime between 1900 and 1901. It is not known why he chose this place to practice medicine and make his home. Alice joined him in 1902, following their wedding, and the couple resided at 516 N. Prairie Street, Bloomington, where, it appears, the doctor also established his office.[12] While the family moved to 502 N. Prairie in 1904 and 410 E. Market the following year, the doctor's office remained at 516 N. Prairie.[13] The family remained at the Market Street address until the doctor's death in 1929.

Sometime between 1906 and 1907, Dr. Covington moved his office to 313 ½ N. Main Street, where he saw patients until 1927, when he moved the practice for the final time to 408 ½ E. Market, a short distance from the family home.[14] It is unknown if Dr. Covington had a nurse or receptionist. In keeping with custom of the day, he made house calls to patients who were unable to make it to the office. One of these patients, Mrs. Caribel Washington, remembered how Dr. Covington always arrived at house calls in a car driven by his son Girard. She also recalled that while he never did drive himself, he always owned a car.[15] However, he must have driven himself, at least on occasion, because, in 1917 he was sued by local architect Arthur F. Moratz for damages resulting from an automobile accident Moratz believed was Dr. Covington's fault. The collision occurred at the intersection of Washington and Lee Streets. The court found for the plaintiff and ordered the doctor to compensate Moratz in the amount of $100.[16]

As for his appearance and demeanor, Dr. Covington was known for being well-dressed, elegant, and articulate; but was considered arrogant by some. The latter observation may have been based on a stereotype of the day that a well-educated and confident Black man was pretentious. Apparently, though, he had an imposing, even regal, presence. "When he stepped into a room," recalled Mrs. Washington, "you knew he was somebody. You knew he was Dr. Covington.[17]

---

[8] *Oral History Interview with Eugene Covington Jr.*, 1992, McLean County Museum of History Archives.
[9] Muirhead., *A History of African Americans in McLean County*, pg. 31.
[10] Covington, Eugene G., *Ancestry Family Trees*, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com.
[11] "Mrs. Alice Covington is Claimed by Death," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 4 June 1925, pg. 3.
[12] *Bloomington and Normal City Directory*, 1902, pg. 155.
[13] *Bloomington and Normal City Directory*, 1904-05, pgs. 151, 140.
[14] *Bloomington and Normal City Directory*, 1907, pg. 138; *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995*, pgs. 145, 708.
[15] Interview with Mrs. Caribel Washington. McLean County Museum of History Archives.
[16] "Jury Awards Plaintiff," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 11 January 1917, pg. 8.
[17] Interview with Mrs. Caribel Washington.

Dr. Covington was recognized by his colleagues soon after establishing his practice in Bloomington. He was voted into the McLean County Medical Society in 1901 and remained a member until 1910, when he was suspended from the society for not paying his dues.[18] However, although he was formally accepted as a peer by the city's physicians, he often fell victim to their discriminatory shenanigans. Some white doctors in town undercharged Black patients in order to lure them away from Covington's practice, knowing full well that he was dependent on the Black community for his living.[19] Nevertheless, Dr. Covington enjoyed a successful and busy practice. It has been said that when he was working to establish his practice in Bloomington, he resorted to some unconventional methods to attract patients. He "used to rush his buggy in and out of the yard to give the appearance of having lots of business."[20] He had a good reputation among all his patients. In the Black community, when new people moved to town, everyone let those newcomers know that "we had a very good doctor."[21]

Not only was he talented, but conscientious. Dr. Covington was deeply concerned about preventative medicine and public health in the Black population, taking time to educate willing listeners on the "importance of better sanitary surroundings" and make "suggestions relative to warding off diseases and preventing sickness in the homes."[22]

Besides owning his own practice, Covington was a member of the St. Joseph Hospital staff and had full privileges at Mennonite Hospital (today known as Carle BroMenn Medical Center). But again, Dr. Covington could not avoid embarrassing discrimination. Regardless of his proven skills as a surgeon, he was allowed to perform surgery only when supervised by a white doctor.[23]

In 1902, not long after arriving in town, Dr. Covington was commissioned assistant surgeon for the Illinois National Guard's Eighth Infantry Regiment at the rank of first lieutenant.[24] The Eighth, an all-Black unit, was later reorganized into the 370th Infantry Regiment, the soldiers of which would become known as the "Black Devils" for their tenacious fighting in the First World War.[25] Dr. Covington was loyal to his commanding officers, defending them in newspaper editorials on occasion, and was a vocal supporter of the Black men who served in the American Expeditionary Force in Europe during World War I. The Colored Women's Club created a service flag with 38 stars, each representing a Black soldier from McLean County currently serving in Europe. Dr. Covington was the guest speaker at a meeting to dedicate the flag on December 11, 1917.[26] He was also master of ceremonies at a meeting to welcome the service men home on February 27, 1919. He was joined at the rostrum by a distinguished group: Mayor E.E. Jones, attorney and Jewish civil rights leader Sigmond Livingston, Wayman African Methodist Episcopal pastor Henry Simons, and Adelbert Roberts,

---

[18] *Records of the McLean County Medical Society 1891-1911*, April 1910.
[19] *Records of the McLean County Medical Society 1891-1911*, February 6, 1908.
[20] Muirhead., *A History of African Americans in McLean County*, pg. 31.
[21] Interview with Mrs. Caribel Washington.
[22] "Colored People in Educational Meeting," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 9 August 1915, pg. 10.
[23] Interview with Mrs. Caribel Washington.
[24] "Successful Colored Doctor," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 3 February 1903 pg. 9.
[25] Kemp, Bill, "'Black Devils' Earned Fame in W.W.I," *The Pantagraph*, 30 Apr 2017.
[26] "That Company G Trouble," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 6 September 1903, pg. 3; "Dedicate Service Flag," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 12 December 1917, pg. 11.

Illinois State Representative from Chicago who, in 1924, would become the first Black state senator in Illinois.[27]

In 1900, Bloomington's approximately 600 Black residents, roughly three percent of the city's total population, lived in relative peace, and residential segregation was virtually unknown.[28] In fact, in a 1903 *Pantagraph* article, the Dr. Covington shared his sentiments on Bloomington, saying he was "well-satisfied with his treatment in this city from a business and professional standpoint" and that he planned to make it his permanent home.[29] However, over the next two decades, as the Black population increased, so, evidently, did white resentment. Residential segregation became more common and higher education became much less obtainable for young African Americans in Bloomington. Very few graduated from Bloomington High School and those who were fortunate enough to avoid unemployment held limiting and menial jobs. Unflattering references to, and images of, Black people appeared in newspapers, and "blackface" minstrel shows and several forms of discrimination reared their ugly heads. Chapters of the Ku Klux Klan cropped up and became active in McLean County in the 1920s, although there is no evidence that Klansmen ever threatened Dr. Covington or his family.[30]

As one of the few well-educated and professional African Americans in Bloomington at the time, Dr. Covington enjoyed credibility in the white, as well as the Black, community - not only in-clinic, but beyond. He began to feel an obligation to use this credibility to confront the growing issue of racism in his adopted community.

Dr. Covington's activism actually began in late 1903 when the *Pantagraph*'s editors asked him, "an educated colored citizen of Bloomington," to write a response to some of the prejudicial and discriminatory views beginning to emerge locally, as well as the traditional, long held, and frequently expressed sentiments of Americans elsewhere, namely, the South. He happily obliged and, in an op-ed article printed on March 13, 1903, he addressed five of the strongest charges against African Americans. There were those who believed Black people should not be allowed to vote (as per the 15th Amendment) because they would become "ignorant tools for unscrupulous politicians." Covington argued that Black people could be very capable voters if only white people would refrain from intimidating them to either vote a certain way, or not at all. Another charge, actually made by a member of a local board of education, was that Black people "must do something to warrant and inspire respect." Covington challenged this thinking by asking, rhetorically, what the standard for respect was, suggesting that white people set it arbitrarily. How could Black people ever meet a malleable burden of proof? He responded to another accusation that Black people had a tendency to commit crimes. He conceded that African Americans did commit crimes, but wrote, "If there be any race now existing not guilty of the same, let that race cast the first stone." There were those who accused Black people of treason and he took the opportunity to remind readers that Benedict Arnold (infamous traitor during the Revolutionary War) and the three assassins of presidents (Booth, Guiteau, and Czolgosz) were white men. His final rebuttal regarded white people's expressed fear of "negro dominations," or the use of their growing population to intimidate. Dr. Covington asked, ironically, if there had been a single incident in which "black men have stood at the polls with shotguns defying a single white man to cast his vote." He concluded by extolling the

---

[27] "Bloomington Honors Famous 'Black Devils,'" *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 28 February 1919, pg. 3.
[28] "Sex, General Nativity, and Color," *U.S. Census*, 1900, Table 23, Pg. 613; "Colored Population, Bloomington's Has Grown Rapidly," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 9 October 1906, pg. 5.
[29] "Successful Colored Doctor," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 3 February 1903 pg. 9.
[30] Muirhead., *A History of African Americans in McLean County*, pgs. 36-37.

accomplishments of the Black race to date, citing the reduction in illiteracy, the authorship of books and newspapers, the practice of law and medicine, the involvement in banking and commerce, and the ownership of property. White people accused Black people of barbary, but, he pointed out that it was the "civilized, humane, and enlightened who lynch and burn us at the stake." "We ask for no special legislation," he concluded, "but equality before the law."[31]

The public was aware of Dr. Covington's medical skill by this early point in his tenure as a Bloomingtonian, but following the article, it was now presented with his eloquence as a writer, and his willingness and boldness in addressing the oft-avoided topic of racism. The article was the advent of nearly three decades of advocacy for the Black community – within and beyond the city - and battles against the various manifestations of oppression.

Covington both encouraged Black people to be ambitious in pursuing lives they were constitutionally guaranteed and ran interference for them in a field of forces trying to thwart them. He emphasized education as a way for young African Americans to have opportunities for success. At the Wood River Sunday School Convention, which he attended in 1903, Covington stated that he "felt proud of the progress his people had made in the past forty years" and hoped that it would continue. He also stated that he was willing to do "all in his power to help to build up members of our race, strong young men and women are needed. Men and women with education, religion and money."[32] At one point, he promised a young African American man that he would buy him a suit if he finished high school. The young man indeed, finished, received his suit, and wore it proudly on graduation day.[33]

There are many examples of the Covington's willingness to confront the banes of Black citizens. One was noted in 1915, when the silent movie *Birth of a Nation* was released. Citing the film's romanticized view of slavery and blatant racism, Dr. Covington fought to keep it out of Bloomington theaters. In another instance, this one part of family tradition, he requested that the mayor of Bloomington hire an African American policeman. The mayor obliged but dismissed the officer a few weeks later when an African American minister expressed fear that the appointment would start a riot. As soon as he found out, Dr. Covington persuaded the mayor to give the policeman his job back which, eventually, he did.[34] It was poetic justice, perhaps, that Dr. Covington's son, Girard Holmes "Doc" Covington, served as a Bloomington police officer from 1929 to his death in 1957.[35]

Dr. Covington's activism eventually led him into the political realm. He was a staunch supporter of the Republican party, which at that time, supported equal opportunity for African Americans. In 1908, Dr. Covington led a rally of African Americans for Richard Yates as he pursued the Republican nomination for governor of Illinois. Yates had been governor from 1901-05 but lost the 1904 and 1908 party nominations to Charles Deneen, who was elected in 1904, and re-elected in 1908, as governor.[36] Dr. Covington served as a member of a committee that organized what was termed a "monster demonstration" at the Coliseum to support the re-election of Republican William Howard Taft as president in 1912. The keynote address was given by John Maynard Harlan, a prominent attorney and two-time Republican nominee for mayor of

---

[31] "The Race Question," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 13 March 1903, pg. 3.

[32] "Negro's Standpoint on Some Race Questions," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 11 July 1903, pg. 9.

[33] Oral History Interview with Eugene Covington Jr.

[34] Ibid.

[35] "Girard Covington, Veteran City Policeman, Dies," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 18 October 1957, pg. 3.

[36] "Colored Voters Parade," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 7 August 1908, pg. 10.

Chicago. Despite the effort, Taft was soundly defeated by Woodrow Wilson, the Democratic governor of New Jersey, in November.[37]

Dr. Covington had political aspirations of his own. In 1915, he ran for city council under the newly established commission form of government. One must consider the courage it took to seek an office and risk losing his clientele, i.e. his livelihood. When one adds the fact that this was a Black man seeking office, the risk had to be considerably greater. At any rate, the doctor ran an honorable campaign, but "notwithstanding his popularity, and a large number of white votes," observed Rev. S. H. Gibson, Dr. Covington did not do well enough in the primary to continue to the general election.[38] He finished with 412 votes, which ranked him 31st in a field of 49 candidates. Only the top eight were granted a place on the general election ballot. The 1915 local municipal election was not without its firsts, however. Helen Clark McCurdy became the first female to earn a nomination for the Bloomington City Council.[39]

Dr. Covington's campaign slogan was "Malice Toward None, Good Will to All," an adaptation of a phrase used by President Abraham Lincoln in his Second Inaugural Address.[40] But, not everyone returned the sentiment. On February 10, 1915, 13 days before the nomination vote for city commissioner, Dr. Covington received a threatening letter from an individual claiming to be president of the "Colored Black Hand Society." The letter, as reprinted in the *Pantagraph*, read,

> *"As it happens, I am president of a most discouraging societies to men like you. Who try to put yourself head of your race. I want to tell you something. You go right down and withdraw yourself as a candidate for the said commissioner. And if you don't, you and your whole family will be killed like dogs. (Remember) I am president of a newly organized Colored Black Hand Society. I will state later why I make this statement in writing." [sic]*[41]

Not only undaunted but emboldened, the doctor answered the letter in the *Pantagraph* the following day:

> *"Replying to the unsigned letter of February 10, 1915, will say: Being urgently requested for quite a while by the most intelligent as well as the most respected members of my race to make the race for commissioner, after which I finally consented. Since my loyalty to my race as an American citizen has stirred the wrath of the president of the newly organized 'Black Hand Society,' and the said 'Black Hand Society' has decided to take my life because I am a law-abiding American citizen, I feel to die for the cause of my race could be no nobler death. Do what you wish with me, but spare my family. I am still in the race." [sic]*[42]

In the early 20th century, the Black Hand was a criminal enterprise, rooted in Sicily and Naples, regions of Italy, and bent on extortion. While the Black Hand may have been real in the Italian immigrant communities in the large U.S. cities, it is unlikely to have spread much beyond

---

[37] "Taft Mass Meeting," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 4 April 1912, pg. 16.
[38] "Bloomington, Illinois, To the Editor . . . ," *Topeka Plaindealer*, 23 April 1915, pg. 2.
[39] "Jones and Rogers Win Out for Mayor," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 24 Feb 1915, pg. 7.
[40] Campaign advertisement, *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 11 February 1915, pg. 14.
[41] "Gets Black Hand Letter," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 11 Feb 1915, pg. 7.
[42] Ibid.

that. No evidence could be found of a central organization with nationwide influence.[43] But, although it proved to be only a shadow enterprise, the "Black Hand" was a familiar and fearsome title which gave rise to copy-cats who used it to threaten citizens for various reasons, usually by anonymous letter. A number of residents of McLean County and surrounding areas – e.g. wealthy or influential citizens, judges - were victims of extortion and intimidation by impostors who identified themselves as such.[44] In Dr. Covington's case, an attempt – by hook or crook - to intimidate a black man from seeking a position of lawmaker was not unusual for the times. He was clearly unmoved by it and, as he promised, saw the election through.

The threatening letter was not the only impediment Dr. Covington faced in his candidacy for city commissioner. Eugene Jr. recalled that his opponents, posing as his supporters, spied on his campaign meetings.[45] Clearly, he was seen as a threat. Yet, despite his defeat, he remained politically active and grew in his resolve to carry the banner for important causes and support clubs, organizations, and lodges endeavoring to empower Black people throughout his life. As a founding member of the Bloomington Republican Club, he strongly supported the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, which attempted to end or significantly diminish the large number of violent vigilante acts against Black people after World War I.[46] He also participated in organizing a local Negro Men's Business League and was a member and secretary of the Illinois Negro Business League.[47] The local league helped sponsor a visit to Bloomington-Normal by renown educator and author, Booker T. Washington, on April 16, 1915. Dr. Washington spoke at several venues in the cities, including Illinois State Normal University. It was either a stroke of fortune or divine providence that Dr. Washington was able to make the trip. He was ill at the time and died a few months later.[48]

Dr. Covington was also a very active member, and for a time, president, of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As president, he ensured that the local – 125 members strong, both black and white - upheld the larger organization's original, 1909, tenets: to make black people "physically free from peonage, mentally free from ignorance, politically free from disenfranchisement, and socially free from insult." Dr. Covington organized a meeting on May 12, 1919, to discuss an apropos topic: "Cooperation Between the Races." The guest speaker was local biblical scholar and peace activist J. Dickey Templeton.[49]

On a more personal, perhaps recreational level, he attended the Wayman African Methodist Episcopal Church, serving on its board of trustees, and played an active role in two black fraternal organizations: he was grand medical director of the United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of Mysterious Ten, and was major and surgeon of the Knights of Pythias in

---

[43] D'Amato, Gaeto (April 1908), "The Black Hand Myth," *The North American Review*, Vol 187, Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa, pgs. 543-549.

[44] "News Notes from Clinton: Circuit Judge Threatened," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 14 July 1909, pg. 2; "Demand $3,000 of Farmer," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 20 December 1909, pg. 2; "Black Hand Plot Nipt," [sic] *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 3 August 1915, pg. 2; "Black Hand Letters Sent Thru Mails," [sic] *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 3 November 1915, pg. 6.

[45] Muirhead., *A History of African Americans in McLean County*, pgs. 29-30.

[46] "Bloomington, Ill: The Republican Club Rally," *The Chicago Defender*, 22 November 1922, p.16.

[47] "A New Organization," *The Forum* (Springfield, Illinois), 10 June 1915, pg. 1.

[48] "Bloomington, Illinois, To the Editor . . . ," *Topeka Plaindealer*, 23 April 1915, pg. 2.

[49] "Colored Association to Hold Meeting," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 12 May 1919, pg. 7.

Bloomington. The Antioch Lodge No. 19 listed him as a member, as did the Free Masons of Pontiac, the Omar Shrine of Davenport, Iowa, and the United Brothers of Friendship.[50]
On occasion, the doctor participated in public debates on topics of racial equality and social justice. He agreed to be part of a policy debate (two teams of two debaters) staged at the Mt. Pisgah Baptist church on May 12, 1921. The debate, sponsored by the Pastor's Church Aid Society, examined the proposal, "Resolved that the negro should stay in the South for better advantages." Taking the affirmative position (saying yes to the proposal) were Charles Brown and Mr. Thomas of Normal. Taking the negative were Dr. Covington and his partner, R. Bailey.[51]

On March 24, 1925, Dr. Covington again took the cause of black people to the mass media. He was elected president of an organization intending to publish *Glad Tidings Magazine* (the group "intended to enlarge the present monthly publication, by the same name, now edited by Rev. E. W. Hensley Union Baptist Church pastor"). Its purpose was to "further the religious and civic status of the race throughout the country."[52]

Alice complemented her husband's activities with those of her own. She was a prominent member of the Progressive Club, which encouraged good citizenship through education, but also enjoyed social activities. She was a charter member of the women's auxiliary to the Physical Culture Club, which sought the "moral uplift of colored girls."[53] However, she, too, expressed frustration at racial inequality, citing Bloomington's segregated events and facilities. Once she attended a performance at the Majestic Theater and was so bothered by the obvious race-based seating arrangements that after that, she refused to patronize segregated facilities in the city, such as the theater and the Miller Park Beach.[54] She supported her husband's NAACP presidency by accepting an appointment to the organization's executive committee.[55]

Alice Alena Lewis Covington died on June 3,1925 of an undisclosed illness and was interred in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. She was, as described in her obituary, "loved by all who knew her."[56] Dr. Covington was, without a doubt, a devoted husband to Alice, but after three years of mourning, he realized he had richly enjoyed not only Alice's companionship, but wedded life itself. On or about November 29, 1928, he married Amanda Thomas, the widow of George Washington Thomas.[57] The Thomases and Covingtons had been good friends before Alice's death and spent a lot of time socializing together. Eugene and Alice attended a Christmas party held by the Thomases in 1923, and the two couples traveled by car to Springfield in November 1924 to hear African American orator Colonel Roscoe Conkling Simmons speak.[58] Eugene and Amanda had no children together.

After a short illness, Dr. Eugene Gray Covington died on February 3, 1929, at the Mennonite Hospital. He was only 56 years old and had continued to practice medicine up until shortly before his hospitalization.[59] In a newspaper memorial the writer stated that "Dr. Covington spent 29 years of his life in this vicinity for the sole purpose of administering relief

---

[50] "Dr. Covington Dies After Brief Illness," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 4 February 1929, pg. 3.
[51] "Mt. Pisgah Notes," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 11 May 1921, pg. 5.
[52] "Colored Citizens to Publish a Magazine," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 25 Mar 1925, pg. 7.
[53] "To Help Negro Girls," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 4 February 1914 pg. 3.
[54] Muirhead., *A History of African Americans in McLean County*, pg. 31.
[55] "Talks in Interest of Local Colored People," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois),13 May 1919, pg. 7.
[56] "Mrs. Alice Covington is Claimed by Death," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 4 June 1925, pg. 3.
[57] "Negro Couple Licensed," Pantagraph (Bloomington, Illinois), 29 November 1928, pg. 3.
[58] *The Chicago Defender*, 5 January 1924, Part 2, pg. 5; *The Chicago Defender*, 8 November 1924, Part 2, pg. 10.
[59] "Dr. Covington Dies After Brief Illness," Pantagraph (Bloomington, Illinois), 4 February 1929, pg. 3

and happiness through his knowledge gained and medicine to those concerned."[60] His campaign slogan was not just a clever variation on Lincoln's theme. He truly believed that "Malice toward none and good will to all" applied to everyone, including African Americans, and fought hard his entire adult life to instill the philosophy in Bloomington and beyond.[61] He was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in a plot shared by his wife, Alice, and his mother, Elizabeth.

By: John Capasso, 2024

[60] Unknown newspaper, J. Whittaker Scrapbook. McLean County Museum of History Archives.
[61] Campaign advertisement, *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), 11 February 1915, pg. 14.