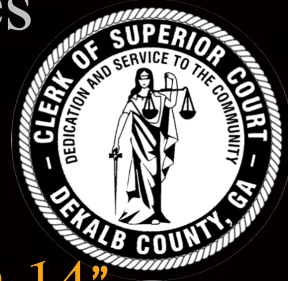


The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



"Armelda Hattie Greene and The Golden 14"

(1918 - 1919)

"First Black Women to Muster into the United States Navy"



Twelve of the Golden Fourteen, from Kelly Miller's *History of the World War for Human Rights*. Front row: 2nd from left, Josie Washington; 4th from left, Armelda H. Greene. Back row: 3rd from left, Kathryn E. Finch; 5th from left, Sara Davis. The remaining women of the group, unidentified in or absent from this photo, are Fannie Foote, Sarah Howard, Pocahontas Jackson, Olga Jones, Inez McIntosh, Marie Mitchell, Anna Smallwood, Carol Washington, Ruth Welborne, and Maud Williams.

The Golden 14 were the first black women to muster into the United States Navy during World War I. The women were dubbed the Golden 14, in retrospect, in homage World War II's Golden 13, the first black men U.S. Navy officers.

In 1916, President Wilson won his second presidential term, and his administration began preparing for the possible entry into the growing European conflict (WWI). During this time, President Wilson was promoting the passage of the Naval Act and the Naval Reserve Act, that called for vastly enlarging the US Navy. In 1917, the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, began filling shore billets vacated by men reporting for sea duty, and new shore billets created by the Navy's expansion, with white women. Most of the women enlisted as yeomen. Yeoman were clerks, typists, and stenographers. A few served as messmen, cooks, electrician's mates, telephone operators, and intelligence analysts.

On August 12, 1918, her 29th birthday, Armelda Hattie Greene became the first black woman to enlist in the U.S. Naval Reserve Forces. Armelda was born in Jackson, Mississippi, on August 12, 1889. She was a light-skinned, college graduate, a divorcée, and former school teacher. She was working as a civilian clerk when America entered World War I in 1914. Because she had a very light complexion, it is believed that she was mistakenly initially identified as white, during her recruitment. Recruiters at this time, in Boston, Norfolk, and Washington, were turning away qualified black women who attempted to answer the Navy's call.

Armelda was in the Aviation Department before being assigned to the Division of Enlisted Personnel, Mustering. The Muster Roll Division kept track of sailors throughout the war. Armelda's brother-in-law, John T. Risher, a Black seaman, was chief of the Muster Office in the Bureau of Navigation. Because of his role, Risher was instrumental in Armelda's transfer. Risher also used the broad language of the Naval Reserve Act and the military's pressing need for administrative support to recruit thirteen more black women and ten black men to work in the Muster Office. Black women working as clerks, typists, and stenographers, broke the cycle of blacks solely working in the mess or as laborers.

Armelda's Navy performance record was exemplary. She qualified by exam for promotion to Yeoman Third Class (E-4). As a senior Yeoman, she trained and supervised the other members of the "Golden Fourteen". Later she was promoted to Yeoman Second Class (E-5). The Navy required all women yeoman to be mustered out by the end of 1919. On November 13, 1919, Armelda Greene received an honorable discharge from the Navy.

The Golden 14 encompassed a diverse group of women from all over the country. Some of the more notable Golden 14 were Sara Davis Taylor, sister of John P. Davis, who was the founder of *Our World*, one of the first national Black magazines, and Ruth Alma Welburn, the grandmother of Ronald H. Brown, the Secretary of Commerce under President Bill Clinton. The others, Pocahontas A.

Jackson, Catherine E. Finch, Fannie A. Foote, Olga F. Jones, Sarah E. Howard, Marie E. Mitchell, Anna G. Smallwood, Maud C. Williams, Carol E. Washington, Josephine Washington, and Inez B. McIntosh, remain pioneers of black history as well as naval history.

The Golden 14 were awarded the World War I Victory Medal for their service before returning to civilian life.

Armelda Green continued to work in the Department of the Navy as a civilian clerk. Later she moved to Philadelphia to be near her younger sister. There she took a clerical position in the Works Progress Administration. Armelda Hattie Greene died on February 19, 1966, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania at the age of 77. She is buried with a military headstone, in Mount Lawn Cemetery, in Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania.

