

Julia Bee Hawkins (1863-1888)

Julia Bee was born in Illinois on March 29, 1863. It's not clear who her parents were, but in the 1880 census, she was listed as the daughter of Henry and Ellen Dean, who might have been her adoptive parents. We don't know much about Julia's life, but we do know some details from her marriage to Absalom "Ab" Hawkins, a well-known carriage and omnibus driver. Ab was born on December 25, 1855, in Kansas City, Kansas, according to his obituary. However, census records say he was born in Tennessee, which makes more sense since Kansas City wasn't founded until 1868. Ab moved to Bloomington with his parents before 1870. His mother, Rachel Hawkins, was listed as a widow in the 1870 Bloomington City Directory.

Julia grew up during a time of big change in the United States. In 1863, the year she was born, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which ended slavery in all areas rebelling against the United States. This was during the height of the Civil War.

At the age of 17, Julia married Ab on September 9, 1880, in Bloomington. Their wedding was announced in *The Pantagraph*. The ceremony took place at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Clay Dean on West Washington Street. It was performed by Rev. Malone, a former pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Bloomington, which is now known as Wayman A.M.E. Church, the oldest Black church in the city. The wedding was attended by many important people, both Black and white. Julia wore a peach-colored silk and satin dress with lace, and Ab wore a black suit with a white vest, gloves, and tie. After the ceremony, guests were served refreshments. The wedding received more attention than most African American weddings at the time. Well-known local figures, like David Davis, A.B. Funk, and Adlai E. Stevenson I, were in attendance and brought gifts for the couple.

After their wedding, Julia and Ab had three children: Hattie Ellen, born on June 13, 1881; Luella, born on October 30, 1883; and Leota, born on June 7, 1886. Sadly, Leota died on August 17, 1887, from the measles at just 14 months old.

Julia was listed as a housewife in her obituary, but many Black women in Bloomington worked as washerwomen, laborers, servants, or cooks. Black men worked as barbers, merchants, and many other types of laborers. There were not many employment options for African American men or women at this time. Ab worked as a hack driver, meaning he drove a small carriage pulled by two horses for people who needed a ride. He was the only African American hack driver in Bloomington at the time. Ab was well liked and respected in the community and never got into legal trouble.

Julia died on June 19, 1888, from a lung disease called pulmonary consumption. She had been sick for three years and passed away at the age of 25 in their home on South Main Street. After her death, Ab never remarried. He lived until he was 47, passing away on September 24, 1903. He was buried next to Julia and their daughter, Leota, at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois.