

The Clerk's Black History Series

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Nannie Helen Burroughs

(May 2, 1879 – May 20, 1961)

“Founder of the Nat’l Training School For Women and Girls”



Nannie Helen Burroughs was born on May 2, 1879, in Orange, Virginia to John and Jennie Burroughs. Her father, who purchased his freedom from slavery, died along with her two younger sisters before Nannie turned five years old. She and her mother moved to D.C., to live with her aunt and for better educational and employment opportunities. Nannie graduated with honors from M Street High School (now Paul Laurence Dunbar High School - one of the nation's first high schools for African Americans). Among her teachers were suffragists and activists, like Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper, who significantly influenced her life.



Although Nannie excelled in school, she was denied multiple teaching positions after graduating in 1890. Many surmised that the rejection may have been due to colorism because of her darker complexion, noting that there was a preference for light-skinned staff. When Nannie didn't get the job, she moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and became associate editor of *The Christian Banner*, a Baptist newspaper. In 1900, Nannie moved to Louisville, KY, and took a position as a bookkeeper and editorial secretary for the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention (NBC) which was founded in 1895. Nannie used her position with NBC to promote gender equality within the organization and eventually founded the Women's Auxiliary of the NBC. That same year she organized the Women's Industrial Club, which offered reasonably priced lunches to area office workers and evening classes in typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, and sewing for its members. It was that same year that she delivered a nationally renowned speech, "How the Sisters are Hindered from Helping" at the National Baptist Convention. She earned a master's degree in business in 1902.

While Nannie worked at NBC, she began planning to open her own school that focused on education for black girls and young women. Nannie didn't want to ask for donations from wealthy white donors to open her school, so instead she relied on small donations and fundraisers from the black community. Eventually she collected enough money from speaking engagements and donations from the community to buy several acres of land in D.C. In 1909, Nannie opened the National Training School for Women and Girls and Nannie was the school's first president.



Nannie's school focused on teaching everything, from cooking, sewing, laundering, printing, barbering, and shoe repair to public speaking, music, and physical education. The school was successful and by 1920, there were over 100 students, including international students. Nannie created her own black history course that was dedicated to informing women about the contributions of negroes to society. The school originally operated out of a small farmhouse. In 1928, a larger building named Trades Hall was constructed. The hall housed twelve classrooms, three offices, an assembly area and a print shop. "Trades Hall", now a historic landmark, was built and its dedication featured many notable speakers including Mary McLeod Bethune. In 1931, she was appointed to chair the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership - a committee related to Negro housing. By 1938, the school was renamed the National Trade and Professional School for Women and Girls.



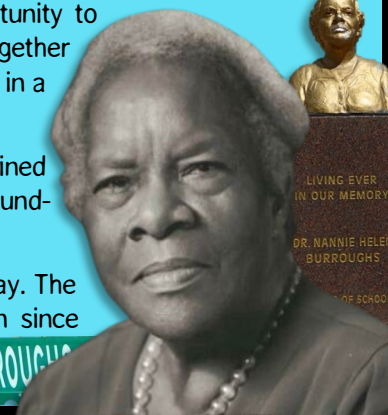
Nannie also worked as an advocate for civil rights for black women and men. At the time, black women had few career choices. Many did domestic work like cooking and cleaning. Nannie believed women should have the opportunity to receive an education and job training. She wrote about the need for black and white women to work together to achieve the right to vote. She believed suffrage for black women was crucial to protect their interests in a discriminatory society.



Nannie Helen Burroughs never married. She devoted her life to her school and remained the principal until her death in on May 20, 1961. Three years later the institution she founded was renamed the Nannie Burroughs School.

In 1975, Mayor Walter E. Washington declared May 10th, Nannie Helen Burroughs Day. The school has been the headquarters of the Progressive National Baptist Convention since 1978. In 1991, the Nannie Burroughs school was designated a National Historic Landmark.

NANNIE HELEN BURROUGHS



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DR. NANNIE HELEN
BURROUGHS
OF SCHOOLS

