

**HONORING**  
**THE PAST... STRIVING**  
**FOR DIGNITY**



A RESOURCE COMPENDIUM OF LABOR HISTORY OF NEW JERSEY

**NJEA**  
**150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**  
**Curriculum Project**

*November, 2003*

**WOMEN IN EDUCATION**

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### Women Pioneers in Education

It is relatively common knowledge that Clara Barton established the American Red Cross, but did you know that first she was a teacher in New Jersey? It was only as a result of being passed over for the principalship of a school **she instituted**, that she resigned from her position in Bordentown and moved to Washington, D.C. The rest is history.

The biographies in this booklet contain similar tales of commitment, courage, and foresight, demonstrated by **some** of New Jersey's finest women in the field of education. Please know that the word "some" has been intentionally stressed, as this is not meant to be a finite collection. It is suggested that these biographies be reproduced, discussed with your students, and perhaps be the impetus for further research.

\*The majority of the material presented can be found in ***Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women*** (First Syracuse University Press, 1997).

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**Elizabeth Almira Allen**

**(1854 – 1919)**

***Teachers' Rights Advocate***

*"What we need above all things is UNITY!"*

~ Elizabeth Allen, 1917

Elizabeth Almira Allen was born on February 27, 1854, in Joliet, Illinois. Her family eventually settled in Mendham, New Jersey, while her father served in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of the New Jersey Volunteers during the Civil War.

In 1867, at the age of thirteen, Elizabeth entered the State Normal and Model Schools of Trenton, today known as The College of New Jersey. After graduating in 1869, she took her first teaching job in Atlantic City. Two years later, Elizabeth Allen began her 48-year association with the public schools of Hoboken, serving as teacher, associate principal, assistant principal, vice-principal, and principal. In addition, Allen played a productive role in the education of future teachers as the principal of the Hoboken Normal and Training School.

In 1890, Elizabeth Allen took an active interest in the welfare of teachers after their years of service. As a rule, female teachers were not permitted to marry while employed by their school districts. Upon retirement, the female educator, who may have dedicated 20-30 years to teaching, had neither a family nor a husband to care for her as she got older. Furthermore, if a teacher had taken ill and was no longer able to work, there was no system in place to offer financial support.

With the encouragement of two of her colleagues from Hoboken, Elizabeth Allen, who was by that time, the vice-president of the New Jersey State Teachers' Association (NJTA)\*, pushed for the establishment of a law which would grant retirement funds to any teacher who was unable to work and had over 20 years of service. The cause officially gained the support of NJTA in 1895, with the appointment of a New Jersey State Committee on Teachers' Pensions, with Elizabeth as its secretary. After many tireless hours of impassioned speeches, addressing unassured colleagues and hesitant legislators, Elizabeth Allen's vision finally became law. In 1896, the New Jersey State Legislature passed the Teachers' Retirement Fund Law, thus making New Jersey the first state to enact a statewide retirement system for public school teachers in the United States.

If Elizabeth Allen had only this accomplishment to her credit, she would be most certainly celebrated as a great champion for teachers' rights. But her crusade for teachers' professional dignity continued. In 1903, the Jersey City Teachers' Club submitted a draft for a tenure bill. At that time, being employed as an educator anywhere in New Jersey could be subject to shifts of political power in the town. Throughout the state, teachers could find their employment at the mercy of an ever-changing mayor, city council, or board of trustees for the school. If their particular benefactor(s) had not been re-elected, teachers could be summarily dismissed without notice. A tenure law would offer some employment protection.

The tenure bill was submitted to Elizabeth Allen, who suggested that the Association should pursue its introduction into the legislature. As with the retirement legislation, initial attempts to secure passage of the tenure bill were unsuccessful. In 1908, the NJTA rallied the support of its members by sending out 10,000 circulars to educators throughout the state. Statewide delegations of teachers attended a hearing held on the bill, which was introduced into the Legislature of 1908. Still, the bill did not pass.

Finally, in 1909, after enduring several non-Association supported rewrites, and surviving a vocal opposition in the Legislature, a tenure bill was passed. The final victory was due, in large measure, to the efforts undertaken by the leadership of the Jersey City Teachers' Club and the tireless labor of Elizabeth Allen. Once again, New Jersey led the way in protecting teachers' rights, becoming the first state in the United States to enact a tenure law. In recognition of her astounding achievements on behalf of educators in the state of New Jersey, Elizabeth Allen was elected as the first woman president of the NJTA in 1913.

Besides her educational work, Elizabeth found time to devote to community and social activities, involving herself in the Women's Club of Hoboken, the Red Cross, and the Hoboken Chamber of Commerce. She also was a staunch supporter of women's suffrage, possessing a global interest in promoting human rights.

Though she held no college degree, she ardently studied history and literature, and spoke French and German fluently. Elizabeth Allen also traveled extensively, considering her limited means and the societal limitations placed on women of the day. She crossed the Atlantic Ocean 54 times, often having her trips paid for by her supporters. The last time she traveled outside of the United States was in 1915, when she found herself stranded in Naples, Italy due to World War I. Not one to sit idly by and allow others to become victims of circumstance, Elizabeth assisted the U.S. vice-consul in Naples in getting Americans safely home.

Elizabeth Almira Allen died on May 3, 1919. Her life was a courageous struggle for the advancement of education and the rights of others. At the Annual Meeting in 1919, the New Jersey State Teachers' Association adopted the following resolution:

"That the Association hereby elects Miss Elizabeth A. Allen as Honorary President of this Association *in perpetuum*, and that her name be printed hereafter in the reports of the Association."

\*In 1938, the New Jersey State Teachers' Association officially changed its name to the New Jersey Education Association.

Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women. First Syracuse University Press, 1997.

Housman, Ida E. The Story of Elizabeth A. Allen. A biography written by a friend, 1944.

Johnson, Laurence B. and Donald Rosser. 125 Years of Service, NJEA. New Jersey Education Association, 1978.

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**Margaret Bancroft**  
(1854 - 1912)

**Special Education Advocate and Pioneer**



*“In a normal person the motor and sensory nervous systems act as the windows of the individual personality.... The broken, many-stained and pictorial windows through which the light is struggling under disadvantages to harmonize itself with the physical world at large are found in three classes of persons—the mentally deficient, the morally deficient, and the insane. In these, the light is there, but the images, as in a broken cathedral window, are more or less shattered and confused.”*

~ Margaret Bancroft, 1904

Margaret Bancroft was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on June 28, 1854. She attended the Philadelphia Normal School, becoming a fifth grade teacher in the city. Although she enjoyed teaching all of her students, she took a special interest in those students for whom learning was a struggle. She began studying and classifying their academic problems, finding that some of her students had poor vision, defective hearing, or were what she termed “mentally deficient.”

Margaret started to earn a city-wide reputation as being the diligent teacher who adapted her lessons and classroom methods to meet the needs of her individual students. Two well-respected surgeons of the day, Dr. W. W. Keen and Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, with whom Margaret had consulted about some of her students, suggested that she open a school which would focus on the needs of those who had problems learning. When she asked permission to take a leave of absence to try her plan, she was denied. Not allowing her dream to be dashed, Margaret resigned from her teaching position in Philadelphia and started her own school in New Jersey.

She chose Haddonfield. That's where her brother lived, and it wasn't too far from Philadelphia, so she could still consult with the two doctors when she needed. She acquired a house in 1883, and it was there that she opened the doors of the Haddonfield School.

During this time, students with learning disabilities rarely received any education or training. Children who demonstrated any difficulty in learning by conventional methods were often shut away in institutions as sources of shame for their families. Committed to the idea that all children could learn if taught in a way best suited to them, Margaret Bancroft developed a unique educational plan for each of her students. She provided her pupils with specialized programs directed at their spiritual, mental, and physical growth. Students received lessons in personal hygiene, exercise, art, and learning their daily prayers. Her classes also visited museums, theaters, circuses, and concerts. In Margaret's mind, no child in the care of her school was hopeless.

Over the course of time, Margaret Bancroft's school grew to include a kindergarten program, as well as lessons in speech, physical education and gymnastics, and manual training. The inclusion of such programs meant an increased enrollment of students and the need for a larger school in 1888. In 1892, that new school burned to the ground. Everyone involved in the school stayed in Atlantic City for several weeks, while Margaret searched for a new location. Luckily, a wealthy Philadelphia man by the name of Charles Lippincott helped purchase a new school for the students of Haddonfield. In exchange, Margaret Bancroft agreed to care for Charles' disabled daughter for the rest of her life.

Margaret was widely respected in her field and dedicated her life's work to changing people's attitudes about those in need of educational adaptations. Between 1892 and 1909, she made frequent speeches to doctors' groups, parents' organizations, medical schools, and the National Education Department.

Until her death in January of 1912, Margaret Bancroft strove to raise the public's awareness of the needs of special students. Today, the Haddonfield School bears the name of its founder. Bancroft NeuroHealth is still headquartered in Haddonfield, educating 900 children and adults from 25 states and four foreign countries. The expert staff of Bancroft NeuroHealth also provides consulting and training services across the United States and abroad, internationally recognized as a leader in special education, rehabilitation, evaluation and research.

Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women.  
First Syracuse University Press, 1997.

*Corporate Information*. Bancroft NeuroHealth. August 3, 2003  
<<http://www.bancroftneurohealth.org/html/corp.html>>.

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**Clara Barton**  
**(1821 – 1912)**

**Free Public School Pioneer**

*“Something drew me to the state of New Jersey. I . . . soon discovered that this good state had no public school, that a part of its children were in private schools, the remainder in the streets. . . . I considered this state of things and decided to take upon me the opening of public schools, generally in that state as well as the eyes of the people.”*

~ Clara Barton

Clara Barton was born on December 25, 1821, in North Oxford, Massachusetts. Had she been born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Clara would have been considered a gifted child. She was reading by the age of three, enthusiastic about learning, and outstanding in her range of interests. Attending private schools until the age of 16, Clara was unusually well educated for a young woman of the 1800s.



Earning her teaching certificate in 1839, Clara prepared to teach her first class of 40 students in Oxford, Massachusetts, in 1840. After teaching at several schools for 10 years, Clara attempted to complete her own education by enrolling at the Clinton Institute in Oneida County, New York. Much to Clara's heartbreak, the death of her beloved mother interrupted her schooling. Never again could she face returning to her home in Oxford.

Instead, Clara Barton accompanied her friend, Mary Norton, to her home in Hightstown, New Jersey, taking a teaching position at Cedar Swamp School in 1851. Upon visiting Bordentown, NJ, Clara was appalled to find that more children were destitute in the streets than were in school. Knowing the value and importance of an education, Clara set out to make a difference in the lives of the children she saw. She approached the School Committee about allowing all of the town's children to attend school for free. Nobody on the committee thought the plan would be successful,



especially being undertaken by a woman. The only way Clara was permitted to take on the experiment was if she agreed to work without salary. She agreed.

In May 1852, Clara Barton's vision took form in the town's first free public school in the "Old Schoolhouse" on Crosswicks Street. On the first day of school, Clara had a class of only six boys. Not discouraged, she continued to work hard, educating her students. Soon, word spread about the dedicated teacher and her free school for any child who wanted to learn. By the end of the first year, Clara's school had grown to 600 students.

The school was such a raging success that the town voted to build a new brick school to better accommodate the students. Frances Childs, a colleague from Oxford, Massachusetts, arrived to provide assistance in running the new school. The School Committee believed that as a woman, Clara was incapable of running the rapidly expanding school, and hired Mr. Childs to be the school's new principal in 1853. Clara was very hurt and angry, leaving both Bordentown and her teaching career behind in 1854.

She traveled to Washington, D.C. to rest and recuperate after her emotional experience. Choosing to live in Washington, Clara eventually began working as a clerk in the United States Patent Office. While living in Washington, the Civil War broke out in 1861. Once again called to service, Clara Barton earned the nickname "Angel of the Battlefield," roaming the hills of Washington, tending to the medical needs of the encamped soldiers. Despite the common feeling of the day that the battlefield was too gruesome a place for a woman, her relief efforts touched the soldiers at the Battle of Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Harpers Ferry, and many others. In 1881, she founded the American Red Cross, working to aid victims of floods, fires, epidemics, and other disasters.

After a long life of educating, comforting, and caring for those in need, Clara Barton contracted double pneumonia in 1911, and died on April 12, 1912.

Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women.  
First Syracuse University Press, 1997.



## Maria De Castro Blake (1911 – 2001)

### Dean Advocate for the Educational Advancement of Puerto Ricans



*“ . . . . being alive means learning and investing in the learning of others.”*

~ Maria De Castro Blake, 1986

Maria De Castro Blake was born in Vieques, Puerto Rico, in 1911. In 1932, Maria migrated to New York City with her brother, shortly after their mother died. She had graduated from Vieques High School with honors, so Maria thought that she would be successful in an office setting. Her first day as a secretary quickly became her last. She had never seen a telephone before and was unable to understand English. She resigned herself to taking a job in a factory in the garment district of New York.

Determined to improve her life, she began taking English classes at night. When she had gained enough skills in the language, she found a secretarial job in Wall Street. Soon after, Maria enrolled herself in night courses at Columbia University. With earnings from her secretarial work, she paid for her sisters' passage to New York. In 1942, she married Thomas Blake, a native of Jersey City, with whom she had three children. She and her family eventually settled in East Orange, New Jersey, in the late 1940s.

In New Jersey, Maria began to volunteer her time to Saint Patrick's Church in Newark, teaching English to

the newly arriving Puerto Rican families that had begun to settle in the city. She tutored the children in the afternoons and the adults in the evenings.

Widowed by 1960, Maria took a full-time secretarial job at Rutgers University in Newark. At Rutgers, she mobilized the Alumni Office to partner with St. Patrick's in its campaign to send poor city children to camp. She was particularly interested in this project because the children selected were also given free medical exams.

As a staff member of Rutgers, she also promoted the idea of enrolling Hispanic students at the Newark Campus. She not only convinced the Admissions officers at Rutgers that these students deserved a chance, but she lobbied the parents and the students to apply. She even helped students fill out the application and financial

aid forms, and at times, helped out those whose checks were late or fell short. Many of those who went on to become professionals, proudly state that without Maria Blake's help, they could not have done it. To them, Maria was affectionately known as "the Dean."

When Rutgers promoted her to the post of Assistant Dean of Admissions in 1965, Maria went on to recruit hundreds of Hispanic students. Never one to limit her role, she also sought scholarship funds and internships from government agencies and corporations for the students she recruited. She served both the University and the Hispanic community for 24 years.

In 1984, when she retired, hundreds of people attended a party held in her honor, respectfully paying homage to the woman who helped them obtain the college education that she had had been unable to secure for herself.

Maria's activism in New Jersey led her to collaborate in the establishment of Aspira of New Jersey, the Association for the Professional Education of Puerto Ricans, the Puerto Rican Congress, and the Black and Puerto Rican Coalition.

Once retired, she moved back to New York City, where she volunteered her services every week to the New York Public Library and the Museum of Natural History for the next 17 years. She stopped shortly before she died, in July 2001, only because by then, her legs could not carry her any more.

For her dedication and her service to those around her, she received the "Woman of the Year" Award in 1991, from the Hispanic Women's Task Force. In 1998, the New Jersey Legislature placed her name along those of Clara Barton, Millicent Fenwick, and other notable women of New Jersey.

Adapted from an original biographical sketch written by Olga Jiménez Wagenheim. *Maria De Castro Blake*. The Newark Public Library. August 4, 2003 <<http://www.npl.org/Pages/ProgramsExhibits/mdb/blake.html>>.

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**Dorothy Allen Conley  
(1904 – 1989)**

**Advocate of African American Studies**

*“Negro history must be studied, not only because it is the history of over 19 million, but American life as a whole cannot be understood without knowing it.”*



~ Dorothy Allen Conley,  
from a speech to the  
Gloucester County (New  
Jersey) Human Relations  
Council on  
October 25, 1966

Dorothy Allen Conley and her students in her West Berlin Elementary School classroom after Berlin Township schools were desegregated in 1952.

(Photo credit:

[http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/njwomenshistory/period\\_5/classroom.htm](http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/njwomenshistory/period_5/classroom.htm))

Dorothy Ruth (Allen) Conley was born in Philadelphia on July 23, 1904. Her father, an unschooled, but highly successful real estate developer, built a home in Albion, Berlin Township, New Jersey, in 1907. She attended elementary schools in Albion and Clementon, graduating from Haddon Heights High School in 1923.

While studying to become a teacher at Glassboro Normal School, Dorothy developed a keen interest in black history and culture. She was not able to find a significant amount of information in her college library, so she looked in the local libraries. She once remarked that she was able to read every book on the topic in Camden County, because there were so few books available.

In 1927, Dorothy began her teaching career at the Berlin Community School, a segregated two-room school for kindergarten through eighth grade. Becoming deeply involved in her community, she would often visit students at home and took an active role in the Albion United African Methodist Episcopal Church. Dorothy was also quite vocal about desegregation, often speaking to church groups and parent-teacher organizations.

By 1941, Dorothy was serving on the Executive Board of the Camden County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1947, she founded and served as president of the Camden County Inter-Cultural Council. The purpose of this organization, as it was of the several other community groups to which she belonged, was to foster racial understanding.

After the desegregation of the school of Berlin Township in 1952, Dorothy was transferred to West Berlin Elementary School. She found that the integrated classroom experience was good for all of her students. As the students became more acquainted with each other, racial misperceptions diminished. She noted that there was less name-calling and physical fighting. However, much to her frustration, Dorothy found that both black and white students had little to no knowledge of African American history.

While returning to college to earn her Bachelor of Science degree, Dorothy developed classroom materials to encourage the teaching of black history. In 1957, her "Negro History Plan" appeared in the ***Negro History Bulletin***. In this plan, she designed a number of creative lessons to engage students in the study of African Americans. After her retirement from teaching in 1964, Dorothy took on the full time creation and promotion of African American history units as the remainder of her life's work. She became so synonymous with the promotion of African American history, that in 1980, President Jimmy Carter invited her to witness his declaration of Black History Month, a project she helped develop.

Nine years later, Dorothy Allen Conley died on December 7, in Voorhees, New Jersey.

Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women.  
First Syracuse University Press, 1997.

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**Mabel Smith Douglass  
(1877 – 1933)**

**Leader in the Movement to  
Establish a College in New Jersey for Women**

*“New Jersey offers a woman one chance, to be trained [in a normal school] as a teacher. Be she ever so fine in another subject, the State offers no other opportunities. They give a boy a chance to be an engineer, an agriculturist, a doctor or a lawyer, but for the girls, there is only one opportunity.”*

~ Mabel Smith Douglass

The first dean of the first college for women in New Jersey was born on February 11, 1877, in Jersey City. Beginning her education in her home state, Mabel Smith Douglass graduated from Dickinson High School. When it came time to select a college, however, Mabel was forced to go out of state because New Jersey had no institutions of higher learning for women. Two of the state’s most prominent colleges, Rutgers and Princeton, excluded the admission of women.

She eventually went on to Barnard College, founded in 1889, which was the only women’s college in New York City. After graduating in 1899, she taught in the New York public schools for three years. Mabel married William Shipman Douglass in 1903, and assumed a more traditional role of the time, staying home to be a wife and mother to their two children.



She remained active in the field of education by participating in the College Club of Jersey City. One of club’s aims was to acquaint high school girls in Jersey City with collegiate opportunities, most of which lay outside of New Jersey. By 1911, Mabel was president of the club. She was invited to attend a district meeting of the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs. While at this meeting, she heard Mrs. John V. Cowling, the federation’s chairman of education, call for the “speedy admission” of women to all male Rutgers College. Mrs. Cowling noted that since Rutgers was supported by federal and state funds, it should be accessible to all eligible residents of the state, whether male or female.

Under Mabel’s direction, the College Club enthusiastically supported the movement, with Mabel, herself, getting directly involved with committee work. She embarked upon an extensive research of New Jersey women and their attendance at institutions of higher learning around the nation. In addition, she investigated the history of coeducational schools, as well as schools established exclusively for women, paying visits to representative institutions of each.

Mabel also sought the support of public officials and state organizations. She met with Woodrow Wilson, who was at the time, President of the United States, as well as the former president of Princeton University and a former governor of New Jersey. In 1914, Mabel Douglass addressed the New Jersey State Teachers Association, laying forth both pragmatic and idealistic reasons for a women's college. To whomever she spoke, she asked plainly, "Why give away all our best paid positions to those trained elsewhere?"

Finally, after several years of persistence, the Trustees of Rutgers College passed a resolution to establish a college for women as a department of the state university in April of 1918. A suitable property had been located on the Carpender estate, and a three-year lease was taken. William C. Demarest, president of Rutgers, invited Mabel to become the first dean of the college. She accepted the offer that May.

The New Jersey College for Women opened in September 1918, with 54 students. Mabel understood the impact this "experiment" could have and her role in its success or failure. Not only did she need to establish the academic standards of the school, but also to carefully construct its public message, customs, and traditions. By her official retirement in 1933, the New Jersey College for Women had become one of the largest women's colleges in the East, with 1,071 students and a faculty of 115. Unfortunately, Mabel Douglass would die, later that same year, in September 1933.

The Trustees Committee of the college recommended that the school's name be changed to Douglass College, in honor of the woman who had dedicated her life to its founding and securing its place of permanence. The proclamation was officially made on Founder's Day, April 16, 1955.

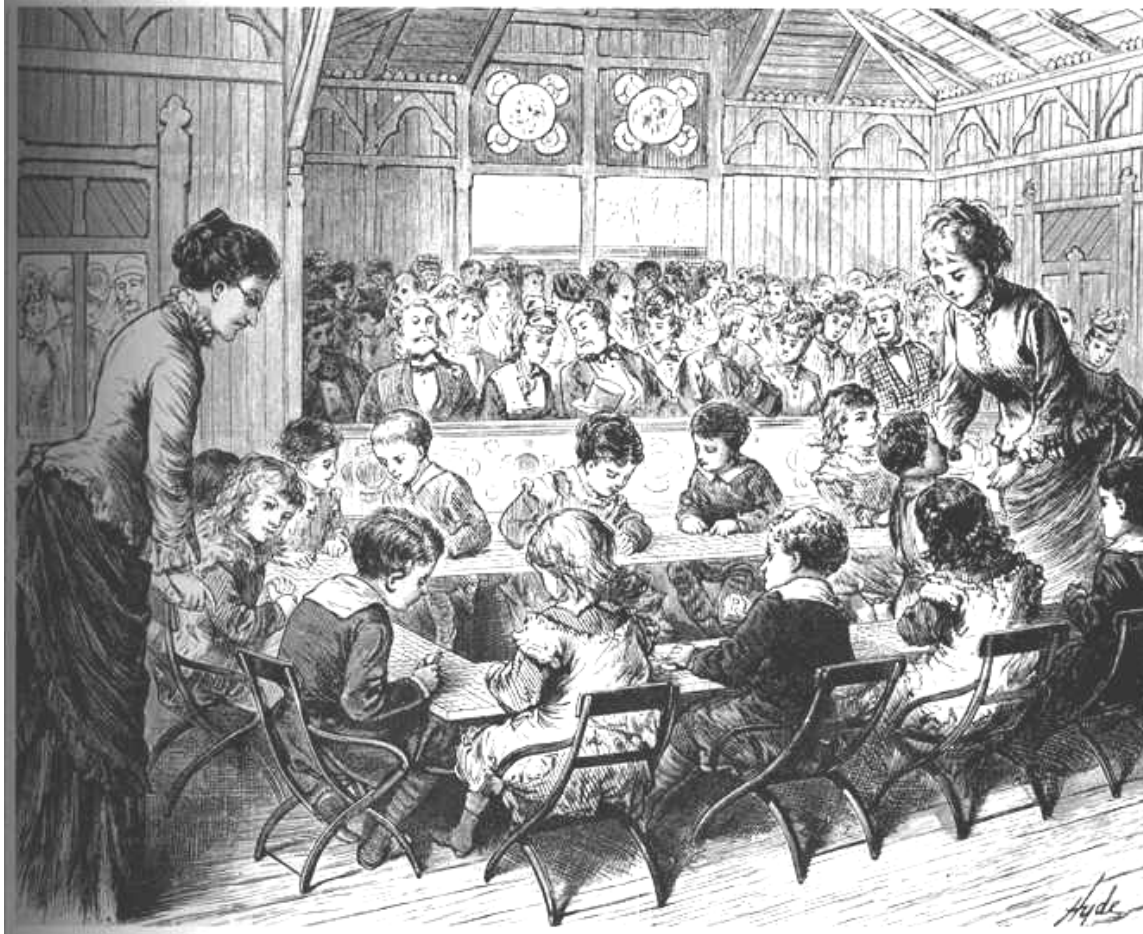
Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women.  
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**Dr. Emma Ward Edwards  
(1845 – 1896)**

**Free Kindergarten Movement**

*"The mind grows by self revelation. In play the child ascertains what he can do, discovers his possibilities of will and thought by exerting his power spontaneously. In work he follows a task prescribed for him by another, and does not reveal his own proclivities and inclinations -- but another's. In play he reveals his own original power."*

~ Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (German educator and the originator of the kindergarten model) *Education of Man*, 1836



Emma Cornelia Ward Edwards was one of the prominent female doctors in Newark and in the state of New Jersey during the latter 1800s. At the age of 21, inspired by the pioneers of women in medicine, Drs. Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell, Emma persuaded several local doctors to let her work in their offices and study their methods. During the Victorian Era, women were typically denied access to medical school. Fortunately for Emma, in 1868, the Blackwell sisters founded the first medical college run for and by women. The Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary was located in lower Manhattan, a very convenient distance for Emma to travel.

After successfully passing the entrance examination, Emma Ward enrolled as one of the first of only 15 students in the medically progressive school. Emma excelled in a rigorous course of study and graduated in 1870, as the valedictorian of the college's first class. She chose to establish a practice in her native Newark, meeting with unusual success, as female physicians were highly uncommon and not easily accepted.

On April 13, 1872, she married Dr. Arthur Mead Edwards, a professor at The Women's Medical College. During this time, Emma took time off from her medical practice and dedicated her time to being a wife and a mother to her two daughters, Harriet and Eleanor. In 1879, she resumed her practice in Newark, after her husband took ill and withdrew from his own practicing of medicine.

As a result of her training by Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, Emma took an active interest in social reforms of the day, namely those that focused on the health and welfare of children. From 1882-1896 served as a physician and director for the Children's Aid Society of Essex County. She was also a strong supporter of the free kindergarten movement in her city of Newark.

A German teacher by the name of Friedrich Froebel suggested that children were a bundle of possibilities at the beginning of life. He believed that through singing songs, playing games, making crafts, and pretending, children were actually learning about themselves and the world around them. This concept was not widely accepted by middle-class Victorian society, who believed children were "beasts" in need of taming, and they should be seen and not heard. It was also believed that it was the sole responsibility of the mother to train her young children, and it was highly improper to allow it to be done by someone outside of the family.

However, to the growing immigrant populations of the late 1800s and early 1900s, the concept of a free kindergarten served a variety of purposes. For the typical immigrant, urban, working-class family, kindergarten was a place for children to learn English and to train them for life in America. It was also a way to remove them from the unsanitary and unsafe conditions of the streets.

As the immigrant population of Newark continued to grow, Emma Ward Edwards saw the need of early education reform for the poor and working classes. She worked diligently in the community for the establishment of a public, free kindergarten. Even after Emma's death in 1896, her daughter Harriet, who shared her mother's beliefs, ran a kindergarten in her home from 1896 – 1900.

As of 2001, there were over 89,000 children enrolled in one of the over 560 half day or 790 full day kindergarten programs in the state of New Jersey.

Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women. First Syracuse University Press, 1997.

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<<http://encarta.msn.com>>. © 1997-2003 Microsoft Corporation.

*New Jersey Vital Education Statistics – 2001-2002*. New Jersey Department of Education. July 31, 2003 <<http://www.state.nj.us/njded/data/vitaled/0102/vitaled0102-s2.pdf>>.

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**Mary Virginia Gaver  
(1906 – 1991)**

**National Leader in the Development  
of School Libraries**

*“ . . . significant contributions to the profession of librarianship in the areas of professional leadership in library development and organization, research, children’s and school library work, library education and her professional and educational writing.”*

~ from the citation accompanying the Herbert Putnam Honor Award of the American Library Association, presented to her in July 1963

Mary Virginia Gaver was born on December 10, 1906, in Washington, D.C. She grew up in Danville, Virginia, and graduated in 1927, from Randolph Macon Women’s College. She taught English at Danville High School for one year, before becoming the school’s librarian for the following nine years. From 1932 to 1950, she pursued additional education in her field of library science, receiving her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from Columbia University.

By 1950, Mary had distinguished herself so highly that Rutgers University asked her to take part in the creation of the Graduate School of Library Science. In 1954, in recognition of her invaluable contribution to the program, she was appointed as one of the six original faculty members. She had achieved the rank of full professor by 1971, earning the distinct respect of her peers and hundreds of students.

Throughout her professional career, Mary was best known for her work in the establishment and improvement of libraries in both elementary and high schools. From 1959 to 1960, she directed a research project sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education that led to an influential report entitled ***Effectiveness of Centralized School Library Services***. She was also very active in the American Library Association (ALA), which established high standards for school libraries. Through the ALA, the Knapp School Libraries Project, which she oversaw, aided several school libraries in



improving the offerings of literary and research materials.

In 1965, when the Education Act made state monies available to improve school libraries, Mary Gaver edited ***The Elementary School Library Collection***, which became the standard source consulted by librarians when they wanted to establish or upgrade their school libraries. Many honors would be bestowed upon her during the balance of her career. Perhaps one of the highest distinctions was her earning the Herbert Putnam Honor Award of the ALA, which had only been conferred twice since its inception in 1939. It was awarded to Mary in July 1963, in recognition of her professional commitment to her peers and in her establishment of the criteria for school libraries.

Mary Gaver retired from Rutgers in 1971, but spent several years after that working as a library consultant. She completely retired in 1980, choosing to live out the rest of her years in Virginia. Although not a native of New Jersey, Mary's professional accomplishments occurred during her 29 years of residence in the state and had a significant impact upon the school and public libraries of New Jersey. Mary Gaver died on December 31, 1991.

Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women.  
First Syracuse University Press, 1997.

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HONORING  
THE PAST... STRIVING  
FOR DIGNITY



A RESOURCE COMPENDIUM OF LABOR HISTORY OF NEW JERSEY

**Lydia Young Hayes  
(1871 – 1943)**

**Integrated Public School Education  
for the Blind**

*“ . . . education concerning the blind should be two-fold: the education of the individual regarding his responsibility to the community and the education of the community to promote understanding of the capabilities of the individual.”*

~ Lydia Young Hayes

Lydia Young Hayes, the first director of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind, was born on September 11, 1871, in Hutchinson, Minnesota. When Lydia was eight years old, one of the bulls on her parents' farm charged her. Lydia was seriously injured and lost her eyesight as a result of the accident. Her parents were determined that Lydia should continue to learn and grow, despite her blindness. Leaving home to live with her uncle enabled her to attend the Massachusetts School for the Blind, better known as the Perkins Institute, where Anne Sullivan, Helen Keller's teacher, received her education.



After graduating from the Perkins Institute, Lydia studied at the Boston Kindergarten Normal School. While operating a private nursery for sighted children, she also volunteered as a home teacher for the adult blind. Eventually, Massachusetts officially recognized home education of blind adults, and Lydia was asked to be one of the program's first two official teachers. Ten years later, in 1910, New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson asked Lydia Hayes to become first chief executive of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind. She held this position until 1937. She fought vigorously for the rights of the blind, believing that they had the right to lead a productive and fulfilling life.

Unfortunately, during that time, not everyone agreed with Lydia's philosophy. As a matter of fact, blind children were often a source of a family's shame, often shut away and segregated from daily interaction with others. Those who were lucky enough to be able to attend school often attended separate educational institutions, away from their peers. Mostly due to Lydia's determination, New Jersey, unlike other states, provided state support and supervision of Braille classes in public schools, a very modern educational program in the early 1900s. Along with a colleague, she established the first classes where both blind and sighted children could learn together, side by side. The program was nationally recognized as innovative, and people from around the country came to see how Lydia ran her program for blind and sighted children.

After retiring in 1942, Lydia moved back to Minnesota to live with her nephew and his wife. She died at the age of 72, on February 8, 1943.

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A RESOURCE COMPENDIUM OF LABOR HISTORY OF NEW JERSEY



**Margaret Sullivan Herbermann  
(1878 – 1963)**

**Pioneer in Public Education for the  
Physically Disabled**

Margaret Sullivan Herbermann was born on January 30, 1878. She received her education in the public schools of Jersey City, where she excelled and explored her love of reading. Upon her graduation from Bay Street High School, she announced that she would like to become a doctor. Although her parents were quite supportive of her decision, getting into a medical school was a difficult feat for a woman of the Victorian Era.

In 1896, she began preparatory science classes at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. With the encouragement and perseverance of her family and teachers, in 1904, Margaret was admitted to the Women's College of Philadelphia, a medical college founded only for women. She graduated in 1908, and specialized in surgery.

When her medical training was complete, she returned to her hometown of Jersey City, set up a home, and established her first medical practice until 1916. During these years, Margaret also assisted the poor. She worked on the staff of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, offering both medical help and education for women about such topics as the importance of cleanliness and the need for good nutrition.

Margaret took active leadership roles in the Child Welfare Association and the Mothers' Institute, granting her further recognition. In 1915, the mayor of Jersey City, Mark Fagan, asked her to serve on the Board of Education. She did so for the next 15 years. During her years on the board, Margaret worked to select qualified teachers and principals, and she also fought for higher teachers' salaries.

Although she had none of her own, Margaret was quite fond of children, and was very close to her nieces and nephews. One day, she was visiting a 12-year old child who lived near her home. She was disturbed to see that the young boy could not read. It seemed that his illness prevented him from attending school. Margaret set into action and arranged for older some neighborhood children to tutor him, eventually teaching him how to read.

Margaret had great compassion for the disabled and strongly campaigned for three laws on their behalf. In 1919, these bills were passed by the New Jersey Legislature, stating that "every municipality having 15 or more crippled children must provide classes and transportation for them, and the State was to give to the city \$100 for the education of each crippled child." To further understand the special needs of the disabled, she traveled abroad to research the most current teaching methods and equipment used. As a result of her efforts, the Clifton Place School for Crippled Children opened its doors in Jersey City, on April 18, 1921. Unusually progressive for its day, it was acclaimed as the first of its kind in the United States. Fifty-three children from all over Hudson County attended the warm and inviting school, which offered transportation, meals, therapy equipment, a sunroom, gymnasium, and a specially trained medical staff.

Although it was Margaret Sullivan Herbermann who fought for the passage of the necessary legislation and was the motivating force in the formation of the school, Commissioner Moore, later elected governor, received the credit for the establishment of the school. A larger, more modern facility was eventually needed to handle the influx of students. The new facility was named in honor of the Commissioner, given the title of the A. Harry Moore School for Crippled Children. The school was part of the Jersey City Public School System until 1963, when the city leased the school to New Jersey City University, formerly Jersey City State College, as a laboratory school for its Special Education program. The A. Harry Moore School is presently funded through the State of New Jersey and continues its association with the University. It has an enrollment of approximately 190 students from Hudson, Bergen, and Essex Counties, whose local school districts make contributions to the school as a resource center for children.

After her husband's death in 1935, Margaret returned to private practice until her retirement in 1960. She died on March 24, 1963.

Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women. First Syracuse University Press, 1997.

Karnoutsos, C.A. *A. Harry Moore School*. Jersey City: Past and Present Web-Site Project. August 4, 2003  
<[http://www.njcu.edu/programs/jchistory/Pages/A\\_Pages/A\\_Harry\\_Moore\\_School.htm](http://www.njcu.edu/programs/jchistory/Pages/A_Pages/A_Harry_Moore_School.htm)>.

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A RESOURCE COMPENDIUM OF LABOR HISTORY OF NEW JERSEY

**Hannah Hoyt  
(1805 – 1871)**

**Founder and Principal of the New  
Brunswick Female Institution**

*“Consider the value to the race of one-half  
of its members being enabled to throw  
aside the intolerable bondage of ignorance  
that has always weighed them down!”*

~ Bertha Honore Potter Palmer, on the  
desirability of girls and women acquiring  
formal education, from which they had  
historically been barred

Hannah Hoyt, founder and principal of the  
New Brunswick Female Institute, also known as  
Miss Hoyt’s Seminary, the Young Ladies’ School,  
and the Female Academy, was born in Connecticut,  
on June 10, 1805.

In 1837, during a time when most education  
was delivered privately to boys of the upper class,  
Hannah Hoyt began teaching a group of young girls  
in a house on lower Albany Street in New Brunswick,  
New Jersey. Her reputation grew, especially among the  
socially prominent families, who sent their daughters  
both as boarders and day students. By 1847, she’d  
saved enough of her \$800 annual salary, to purchase  
a three-story house from which she ran her school  
until her death.

She was known to be a strict, but beloved,  
disciplinarian. As a teacher, Hannah Hoyt was  
particularly fond of the classics, emphasizing  
Shakespeare, Cooper, and Milton, in addition to  
teaching geography, philosophy, astronomy,  
mathematics, physiology, Latin, Greek, and the  
Bible. Not just a finishing school for the young  
ladies of the genteel set, potential graduates had  
to pass public examinations by Rutgers professors  
before being granted their diplomas.

Though Hannah Hoyt’s school closed upon her  
death in November of 1871, she inspired other  
women to open schools for girls in her tradition of  
discipline and academic excellence. The existence  
of such schools laid the groundwork for years of  
educational reform, including the establishment of  
coeducational learning institutions and the first  
colleges for women.



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A RESOURCE COMPENDIUM OF LABOR HISTORY OF NEW JERSEY

**Marie Louise Hilson Katzenbach  
(1882 – 1970)**

**Instrumental in the Formation of  
the State College System**



She was often referred to as New Jersey's "first lady of education," having worked tirelessly to open higher education opportunities for others, but Marie Louise Katzenbach never received a college degree herself. She was, however, one of the first two women appointed to the State Board of Education, serving for 44 years, and was its first woman president.

She was born on December 8, 1882, in Trenton, New Jersey. After graduating from the Trenton Model School, a high school affiliated with the New Jersey State Normal School, Marie began her lifetime career of public service. At 18, she went to work at the Union Industrial Home, an institution for orphaned children. While there, Marie saw some things that she found unsettling, so she set about changing them. The children in the orphanage were isolated from other children. She pushed for them to be educated in public schools. When she joined the home's Board of Managers in 1913, she pushed for the necessary psychiatric treatment and special education programs required by many of the residents.

In 1921, Marie accepted an appointment to the State Board of Education, on which she strove to bring higher education to as many people as possible. When she first took office, places of higher education were somewhat limited. She was instrumental in the formation of the state college system; during her tenure on the state board, the two-year normal schools were transformed into four-year colleges, and three more state colleges were founded. She also pushed for the development of Rutgers into the State University in 1955, with her special interest being Douglass College for women. Through her efforts, major college course revisions were implemented, and the county college program was instituted.

After a serious car accident in 1964, Marie Katzenbach resigned the presidency of the State Board of Education, though the governor to ask her to remain as a consultant. She died at the age of 87, on February 4, 1970, at her home in Princeton. Prior to her death, she was conferred with a doctorate of humane letters from the Newark College of Engineering, citing her "unselfish service to her family, to education and to the welfare of her fellow citizens of the State of New Jersey."

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A RESOURCE COMPENDIUM OF LABOR HISTORY OF NEW JERSEY

**Mother Mary Xavier Mehegan  
(1825- 1915)**

**Founder of the First Four-Year College for Women in New Jersey**

Catherine Josephine Mehegan was born in Skibbereen, County Cork, Ireland, on February 19, 1825. Because of the social and political climate of the time, the educational system was founded on and promoted the Protestant faith, leaving the children of Catholic families to receive home schooling.

Like many Irish of the time, Mother Xavier immigrated to America in 1842, with her older sister, Margaret. Facts surrounding their arrival and early days in America are sketchy, but being that both girls were skilled seamstresses, it is possible that they were employed as dressmakers.

After her sister Margaret married and moved to Australia, Mother Xavier was left alone in New York City. New York had become the final destination of the burgeoning immigrant population, and Mother Xavier responded to this great social need in concordance with her strong religious convictions. In 1847, she entered into the convent of the Sisters of Charity.

For the next 23 years, Mother Xavier was very active in her religious community, serving at various times as nurse, social worker, and director for new entrants into the convent. In 1860, the sisters purchased 43 acres of land from Seton Hall. On this land, the new motherhouse was built in Madison, New Jersey.



Much to her credit, Mother Xavier responded to the need for women's colleges in the state of New Jersey. In September of 1899, the College of Saint Elizabeth at Convent Station welcomed its first class and became the first continuous four-year college for women in New Jersey. It would not be until 1918, that the Trustees of Rutgers would establish the first, secular New Jersey college for women, Douglass College.

Mother Mary Xavier Mehegan died at the age of 90, on June 24, 1915.

Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women.  
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A RESOURCE COMPENDIUM OF LABOR HISTORY OF NEW JERSEY

**Nellie Katherine Morrow Parker  
(1902 – 1998/2000)**

**First African American Public Schoolteacher  
in Bergen County**

*“It’s too bad if one little colored girl can be such a bother to you.”*

~ Nellie K. Parker to her new school superintendent after his repeated suggestions to transfer to a segregated school in the South

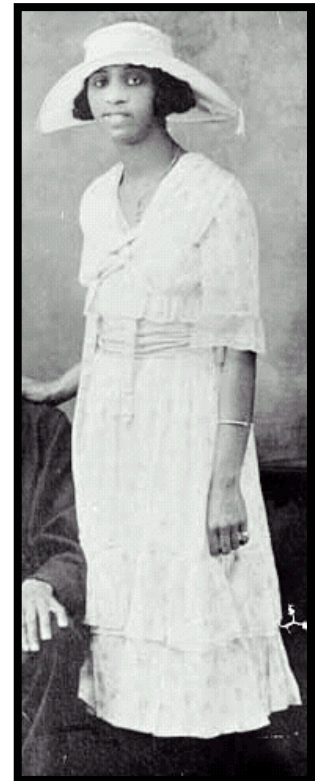
Nellie Katherine (Morrow) Parker was born on August 27, 1902, in Hackensack, New Jersey. Uncommon for African Americans of the time, both of Nellie’s parents could read and write. Her father was a Methodist minister who took a job as custodian of Johnson Public Library, giving Nellie access to world of books. At an early age, Nellie Parker was instilled with a love of religion and a love of education.

With her intelligence and aptitude, Nellie was born to be a teacher. In high school, however, she was often encouraged to take home economics classes, in order to prepare her to become a maid. Her father would have none of it. He insisted that she take college preparatory classes, vowing to send her to college no matter what the monetary cost.

Given New Jersey’s history as one of the last states in the Union to outlaw slavery, growing up black in Hackensack was quite difficult for Nellie. In its past, Hackensack had its share of slaves, and during Nellie’s lifetime, some traces of the peculiar institution remained. The city’s YMCA did not permit African Americans, and it had been the site of one of the largest plantations in the North. The first lynching of a black in Bergen County occurred on the site of the Hackensack Courthouse. Nellie was surrounded with sobering reminders of what her “place” in that society was supposed to be.

The Morrow family lived on the outskirts of a white, middle-class neighborhood, but the children of black families were relegated to attending two segregated schools on the other side of town. Nellie’s father fought for his children to attend their own neighborhood school. Attendance of this school was not easy for the children, as they endured the daily threats and taunts of the white households they passed on their way to school.

Nellie was a very lonely child, often sick, she had to work twice as hard to keep her place in the white school. The black community did not support her family’s efforts, accusing them of being haughty and superior, and trying to “act white.” The white community strongly resented their actions because the family refused



to “act black.” It was Nellie’s father who kept reinforcing the concept that diligence in one’s convictions for self-improvement would win out in the end.

After Nellie Morrow graduated from Hackensack High School, she embarked on her dream of becoming a teacher. She attended Montclair Normal School in 1920, receiving her teaching certificate in 1922. To her father, it was paramount that she remain in the North and attend a local college, rather than going to a southern college. He did not want Nellie to be accused of not being properly educated enough to teach in a northern school.

Nellie wanted desperately to teach in Hackensack, but the Board of Education had made it very clear that they did not want to hire an African American teacher. Nellie already had a strong familiarity with the district, both as a student and a student teacher. The latter had been a highly controversial appointment, so the Board was committed to granting Nellie any sort of permanent employment. The African American residents of the town did not support her employment, either. It was widely felt that any gains made by Nellie would result in violent repercussions on the black community and increase racial tensions. It would seem that Nellie was all alone in her pursuits.

If not for the courageous actions of the city’s superintendent of Schools, Dr. William Stark, Nellie’s story may have ended here. Already at odds with the Board on unrelated matters, Dr. Stark was wrestling with his conscience. Ultimately, he granted Nellie her teaching contract, but sacrificed his own employment in the process. Nellie signed a three-year, trial basis contract, granting her a classroom of her own.

The new superintendent did not take kindly to Nellie’s presence in the district, encouraging her to resign at the end of every school year. In the community, she was continually harassed, ridiculed, and isolated. She was also the subject of many town meetings, disparaging newspaper articles, and the recipient of hate mail. The Knights of Columbus and the Daughters of the American Revolution adamantly expressed their disapproval of her employment. The Ku Klux Klan even staged a march past her home, but nothing deterred Nellie Morrow from her staunch convictions.

Nellie had survived her three-year trial period and remained in the Hackensack school system, teaching fifth and sixth grade for 42 years. She started teaching at a segregated school, but when the district became integrated in 1953, Nellie was moved to another school, where she stayed until her retirement in 1964.

During her teaching years, Nellie focused on creating an atmosphere of love and helpfulness. She instilled her students with a sense of self-respect, as well as a sense of black pride and identity. She also shared her love of music by leading the school choir.

The Board of Education renamed the Maple Hill School, the Nellie K. Parker School, in July 1981. She was hailed as “a pioneer in racial equality in education” at the dedication ceremony on September 20, 1981.

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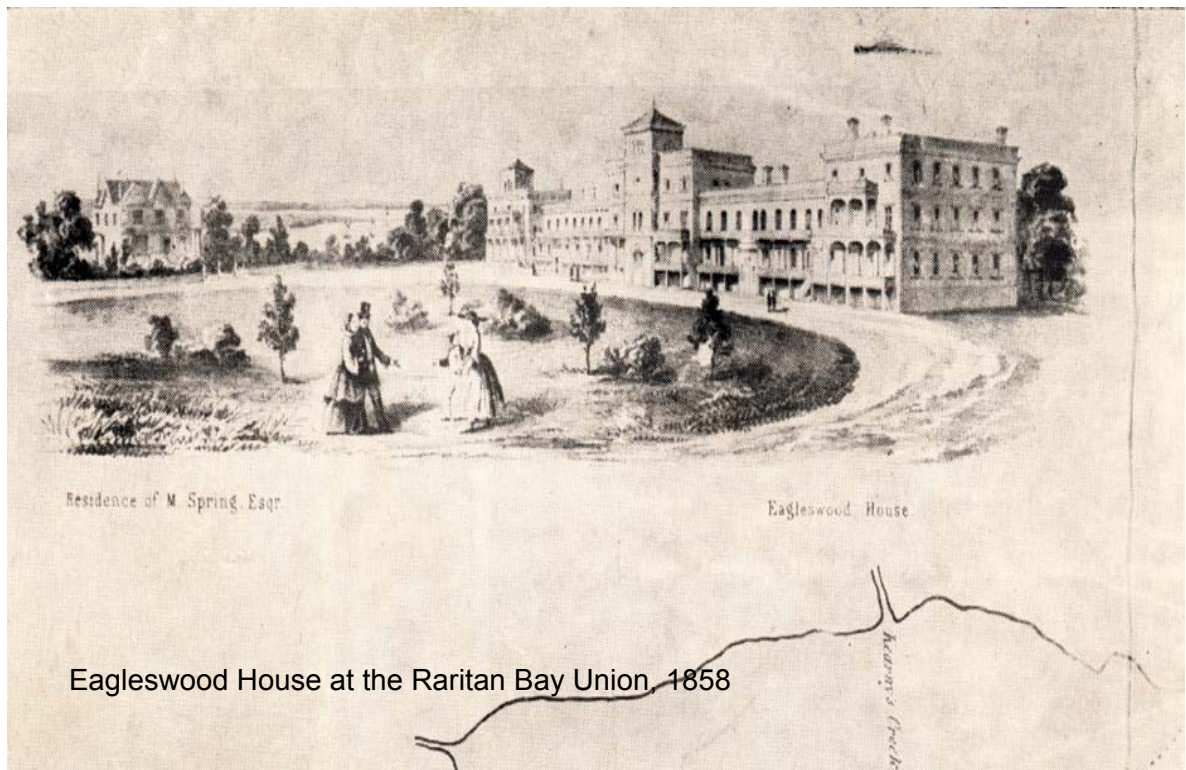
A RESOURCE COMPENDIUM OF LABOR HISTORY OF NEW JERSEY

**Rebecca Buffum Spring  
(1811 – 1911)**

**Advocate for Coeducation**

*“Can a woman become a genius of the first class? Nobody can know unless women in general shall have equal opportunity with men in education, in vocational choice, and in social welcome of their best intellectual work for a number of generations.”*

~ Anna Garlin Spencer (1851–1931),  
U.S. educator, author, feminist, and Unitarian minister.  
*Woman’s Share in Social Culture*, ch. 3 (1913)



Rebecca Buffum Spring was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on June 8, 1811. Throughout her life, she dedicated herself to two missions: the abolition of slavery and the equality of educational opportunities for females.

After receiving her education in Rhode Island, at the Quaker-run Smithfield Academy, Rebecca began teaching at factory schools for children who worked in the mills of Fall River and Uxbridge, Massachusetts, and she later did the same in Philadelphia, when her family moved there in 1834.

While in Philadelphia, Rebecca's sympathies for the anti-slavery cause deepened, as she involved herself in integrated Philadelphia schools. Sharing her passion for abolition was a dry goods merchant by the name of Marcus Spring. They married in 1836, and had three children together. The Springs had an unusually equal marriage for the day, and they often worked together on social and political projects.

Marcus Spring was quite eager to help the urban poor increase their standard of living. As a result, the couple started two utopian communities in New Jersey. These were the North American Phalanx in Red Bank (1843-55) and the Raritan Bay Union in Perth Amboy (1853-59). At the heart of these communities was the notion that the residents would share all the property equally and all products of labor would be distributed according to need.

While at Raritan Bay Union, Rebecca co-founded a school with her husband. Eagleswood School was a progressive, coeducational boarding school. Some of the most celebrated minds of the day, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Horace Greeley, came to the school as guest lecturers. In addition, Rebecca took great pride in selecting strong women to teach at Eagleswood, thus serving as role models for her students. The Grimké sisters, Sarah and Angelina, who were noted abolitionists of the time, and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody and Mary Peabody Mann, outspoken advocates for kindergarten in the United States, were all teachers at Eagleswood. Most notably, the school focused on providing a supportive environment for females. Girls were encouraged to speak their minds openly, participate on the stage, and excel in athletics, highly unconventional practices in education for the time.

After an 1852 visit to South Carolina and Cuba, Rebecca was even more committed to abolitionism, having seen the appalling conditions in which the slaves lived. She vigorously set to work, and Eagleswood School became a station on the Underground Railroad. In 1859, she even paid a comforting prison visit to John Brown, after his attack of the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. In the hours before his execution, she promised to bury two of his raiders, also awaiting execution, in free soil. Even though the community strongly objected, Rebecca won, and buried the two men on the grounds of Eagleswood. As a result, the school became a gathering place for Brown sympathizers and a place of solace for John Brown's widow.

By the 1860s, Eagleswood had become a military academy in support of the Union during the Civil War. By 1868, the school was becoming too much of a burden for the Springs to manage, and it was closed by the year's end.

Rebecca moved to California in 1874, after her husband's death, but the experimental school in New Jersey was never far from her thoughts. She died on February 8, 1911, four months shy of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Adapted from Burstyn, Joan N., ed. Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women.  
First Syracuse University Press, 1997.



## Gertrude Potter Ward (1875 – 1956)

### Advocate for Health Care in Public Schools

*“Care is a state in which something does matter; it is the source of human tenderness.”*  
~ Rollo May, American existential psychologist



Gertrude Potter Ward was born into a socially prominent family in Bloomfield, New Jersey, on October 16, 1875. Gertrude was very influenced by the civic contributions of her father and the global exploits of her Aunt Lydia. Wishing to follow in her aunt's footsteps, Gertrude expressed an early desire to travel the world as a missionary, hardly the role for a young lady born to a wealthy, Victorian family. Her parents quickly discouraged such thoughts, but this did not deter Gertrude from her calling to make a difference, so she set off to college.

After attending both Wellesley and Columbia, she decided to attend medical school at Cornell. She graduated in 1900, and established a practice, treating women and children out of her home in Bloomfield.

Gertrude gained public acclaim during the statewide epidemic of smallpox from 1903 to 1904. She visited many of the area's sufferers by horse and buggy to combat the shortage of available doctors. She also built a treatment facility in the "wilds of Brookdale," when local hospitals and quarantine centers were taxed to capacity. She continued these practices for the duration of the epidemic, earning a heroic reputation in the community.

Gertrude Ward is best known for establishing the League for Friendly Service\* in 1910, the first professionally run, social welfare agency in the state of New Jersey. Influenced by the philanthropic organizations forming in New York City, like the Charity Organizations Society, Gertrude envisioned a place where those in need could come to receive information, advice, and compassion.

She personally oversaw the league's work for almost 50 years. Important features included vocational classes for immigrants, a home nutrition service, and public health nursing. Gertrude took a special interest in the health needs of children and was instrumental in establishing several programs in the community. Under her direction, there was a milk distribution program, dental clinics, home tutoring for the sick, and on-site nursing care in the schools. Until 1914, she served as Bloomfield's first school physician.

Despite the occasional display of local resistance, Gertrude Ward persisted in her aim to offer assistance to any needy person, regardless of ethnicity, chairing the league's Executive Committee until her death in 1956.

(\* Today, the agency is known as the League for Family Services.)

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**Marion Manola Thompson  
Wright  
(1905 – 1962)**

Promoter of Integration • Laid the  
Foundation for the Study of African  
American History in New Jersey Schools

*“It will also be necessary for New Jersey educators to realize that feelings of intolerance and prejudice are disintegrative forces acting upon those who are subject to them as well as upon those against whom they are directed.”*

~ Marion Thompson Wright,

*The Education of Negroes in New Jersey, 1941*

Marion Manola (Thompson) Wright was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1905. In 1923, she graduated at the top of her class from Barringer High School, one of only two African American students at the distinguished learning institution. Marion was then offered a scholarship to Howard University, where she earned her bachelor's degree in sociology in 1927, graduating magna cum laude.

Marion began her doctoral studies at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1931. Her dissertation, entitled *The Education of Negroes in New Jersey*, became her most significant accomplishment and the basis for her life's work. Teachers College published her work in book form in 1941. At the time, she was the first black woman to receive a Ph.D.

Marion Wright's book contained some of the earliest, academic research done on the history of African Americans, from slavery to the 1930s. Most importantly, she documented many examples of racial segregation in New Jersey, well as the glimmers of hope that existed in the system. Marion focused especially on the role segregation was playing in the public schools, citing the existence of inadequate, dilapidated structures and sparse supplies. Furthermore, she suggested that being educated in such conditions did not encourage African American students to excel, but only indoctrinated feelings of inferiority.

Marion's work gave rise to significant change on the state and national levels. Governor Alfred Driscoll commissioned a Division Against Discrimination to address the concerns expressed in Marion's dissertation. Ultimately, the New Jersey constitution was amended in 1947, mandating the end of segregation in the schools and state militia. President Harry S. Truman referenced this decision as a precedent when he ordered the desegregation of the national military in 1950. Three years later, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) asked Marion to assist in preparing research for the landmark civil rights case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. In 1954, the Supreme Court unanimously declared that it was unconstitutional for schools to segregate on the basis of race.

For the remainder of her life, Marion continued to publish works that addressed her concerns for racial equality in all aspects of society. She also actively participated in a wide range of organizations, including two that promoted women's roles in higher education and one that offered counsel to unwed mothers.

After a lifetime spent challenging the separatist norms and mentalities of her day, Marion Thompson Wright died in October of 1962.

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