

\*BAPTIST HERITAGE\*

## Nannie Helen Burroughs

Kathy Hillman—Woodway, TX

Nannie Helen Burroughs created a stir among Texas and Southern Baptists when her photograph appeared on the cover of the June 1947 issue of the Woman's Missionary Union's publication, *Royal Service*. Blacks had previously appeared in the magazine, but only accepting ministry. This time WMU featured Burroughs as a missions leader. But Nannie Helen was no stranger to raised eyebrows.

Born in 1879 to former slaves, Nannie Helen graduated with honors from high school and studied business. With most doors closed, Miss Burroughs became a secretary for the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention, then the largest African American religious organization. She caught the eye of the convention when she gave a speech titled, "How the Sisters are Hindered from Helping." Board leader L. G. Jordan saw her potential and took her to meet Annie Armstrong, then Corresponding Secretary of WMU. Annie and Nannie Helen mapped out organizational plans for the National Baptist woman's auxiliary.

But Burroughs led in other ways. The only American woman taking a major role in the first meeting of the Baptist World Alliance in London in 1904, the 25-year-old electrified the audience. In 1909 she founded the National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington. The curriculum emphasized academics and vocations as well as the "Three B's"—Bible, Bath, and Broom—meaning "clean mind, clean body, and clean house."

Because of her Bible study and Baptist convictions, Nannie Helen pursued equality for her race and gender. Noted as a captivating writer and courageous orator, she called on people to use "ballots and dollars" to fight segregation. When she criticized President Woodrow Wilson's silence on lynching, the government placed her under surveillance. The first black woman to be heard on a national radio network, Burroughs spoke eloquently for women's right to vote and equal employment.

In spite of difficulty due to Jim Crow travel restrictions, Miss Burroughs became WMU's official contact with black women from 1900 until her death in 1961 as she served as corresponding secretary (1900-1947) and later president of Woman's Convention (1948-1961). Nannie Helen believed that black women laboring together with God and their white sisters held the key to bettering the lives of all persons.

Thank God for Christians like Nannie Helen Burroughs who faithfully and tirelessly use their gifts and influence. Ask the Father to help individual Texas Baptists step forward in ministry to all persons.



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