



- *Activist*
- *Founder*

Nellie Peters Black

1851–1919

Inducted 1996

Nellie Peters Black devoted a lifetime of service to an extended community. Blessed with a strong mind and persuasive personality, she was an informed and forceful advocate for free kindergartens and hospitals, compulsory education, diversified farming, and the enforcement of child labor laws, as well as for the admission of women to the University of Georgia and the Georgia Bar. When the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs decided to honor a former member on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee, Nellie Black was the obvious choice.

Born Mary Ellen Peters in Atlanta in 1851, she was the eldest of nine children. Her father was a Pennsylvania engineer who came to Georgia to survey the railroad and became a prominent developer of the city he helped to rename. Educated at a Pennsylvania academy with the daughters of America's most privileged families, the desire for service was instinctive in her, and she became involved in it many years before women began to organize for charitable work. When her father offered her a diamond ring on her eighteenth birthday she asked for a saddle horse instead; she named the horse Diamond and rode it daily about the city on what her obituary termed "errands of mercy."

In 1877 she married George Robison Black, a Confederate Colonel and lawyer from Screven County, and they had four children in addition to his three from a former marriage. He served as a state senator and was later elected to represent the first district in Congress. It was while they were living in Washington that he suffered a stroke; his death four years later left her with seven children to raise and a farm to manage. In 1888 she moved her family back to Atlanta where, in her early forties she began her career in civic reform.

She promoted the founding of the King's Daughters Hospital on Pryor Street, and when the city's growth demanded a larger institution, was a prime mover in founding Grady Hospital. She became the first president of the newly organized Women's Auxiliary of the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia and was instrumental in establishing Atlanta's first mission, later the Holy

Innocent's Mission on Fifteenth Street. She helped organize and raise funds for the Atlanta Free Kindergarten Association, which she served as president for twenty years; kindergartens finally became part of the public school system in Atlanta in 1919.

A consummate clubwoman, Mrs. Black was a charter member of the Atlanta Woman's Club, active in forming the City Federation of Women's Clubs, and a leader in the Georgia Federation, an organization which enabled her to reach large numbers of women with the message of service. She served three terms as President of the Federation during the critical years of World War I, working to organize the group's war efforts. She held honorary appointments from President Woodrow Wilson and Georgia's Governor and testified on multiple issues before the Georgia legislature and its Board of Regents.

"One of the truly great women of Georgia."
– The Atlanta Journal

She was still in office as federation president when she died on August 4, 1919 following a brief illness. The Atlanta Journal, calling her

"one of the leading women of the South," wrote: "Her name was a synonym for charity, for gentleness of spirit, for love of humanity, for constructive citizenship. No man or woman in the last century has exerted a stronger influence for the uplift and advancement of the state."

For her instinctive desire to serve, for her many good works, and for leading other women in the direction of such constructive citizenship, we are pleased to announce the selection of Nellie Peters Black as a 1998 Georgia Woman of Achievement.

Additional Resources

Nellie Peters Black (books, papers & more)
University of Georgia, Georgia Interconnected Libraries (GIL) (author search on Black, Nellie Peters)
(706) 542-3251

Nellie Peters Black Letters
Georgia Secretary of State, Div. of Archives & History (GIL) (author search on Black, Nellie Peters)
(404) 656-2350

Nellie Peters Black Papers
Atlanta History Center (author search on Black, Nellie Peters)

Copyright ©2005 Georgia Women of Achievement, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

(404) 814-4000

American Women and the World War, Ida
Clyde Clark, D. Appleton & Co., 1918,
Chapter XIX, Georgia, Idaho, and Illinois