



- *Activist*
- *Founder*

#### **TIMELINE**

**1888** – Receives diploma from Spelman Seminary

**1888** – Begins teaching English in Georgia

**1893** – Marries Henry Rutherford Butler

**1895** – Moves to Atlanta with husband

## *Selena Sloan Butler*

1872–1964

### ***Inducted 1995***

Selena Sloan Butler was born with few material advantages, but through determination and a sense of purpose she was able to create institutions needed for her own and her child's welfare. In doing so, she served the needs of black women and children nationwide.

Selena was born in Thomasville, Georgia, some time around 1872, a few years after slavery was abolished. Her mother was a woman of African and Indian descent. Her father was a white man who supported his children and their mother but did not live with them. Selena's mother died while she was still a child.

Under difficult circumstances, Selena put what resources she had to work. She received elementary school training from missionaries in Thomas County. Then, under sponsorship of a minister, she attended Spelman Seminary (now Spelman College). Graduating at age 16 she embarked on a career in teaching English and elocution, first in Atlanta, then in Florida.

In Atlanta Selena met Henry Rutherford Butler. They married, and she accompanied him to Boston, where he attended Harvard. In 1895 they returned to Atlanta, where Henry became one of the most prominent black physicians in the city.

As their son, Henry, Jr., approached school age, Selena looked for a preschool. Finding none in her neighborhood—or in any black neighborhood in the city—she started a kindergarten in her home.

When Henry entered the Yonge Street Elementary School, Selena began seeking ways to help parents get involved in their children's education. Enlisting support from other parents, she organized the first black Parent-Teacher Association in the United States at Yonge Street School.

Using her teaching experience, Selena worked toward establishing a statewide black Parent-Teacher Association. With her help, a group named the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers appeared a few years later. This group maintained

**1899** – First son is born

**1911** – Forms nation's first black parent-teacher association

**1919** – Forms statewide PTA

**1926** – Forms National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers

**1929** – Appointed by President Herbert Hoover to serve in White House Conference on Child Health and Protection

**1931** – Henry (husband) dies; in subsequent years Selena moves to London where she works with Nursery School Association and to Arizona where she organizes Grey Lady Corps

**1947** – Returns to Atlanta

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close contact with the white Parent-Teacher Association and modeled its policies in cooperation with that organization. Though the two national organizations did not merge until after her death in 1964, Selena was named one of the national founders of the national Parent-Teacher Association.

***"We in the National Congress have lost a great leader; but we are the heirs of a rich legacy bequeathed to us by the energetic, intelligent...life of this pioneer for children."***

– Jewett Hitch, former President of the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers, written after Mrs. Butler's death in October 1964

Selena was also active in educational issues throughout her lifetime. She was a delegate to the founding convention of the National Association of Colored

Women; the first president of the Georgia Federation of Colored Women's Clubs; a member of the Georgia Commission on Interracial Cooperation; a member of the Chataqua Circle of Atlanta; and a member of the Order of the Eastern Star.

After her husband's death, Selena joined her son, also a physician, who was stationed at an Army hospital base in Arizona. There she organized the first black women's chapter of the Gray Ladies Corps.

Selena died at the age of 92 and is buried with her husband at Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta. Her portrait hangs in the Georgia State Capitol. She has been honored by President Hoover, the American Red Cross and Spelman College.

### **Additional Resources**

#### **Selena Sloan Butler file**

Spelman College Archives  
(404) 681-3643

#### **Atlanta Papers of the Chautauqua Circle**

Woodruff Library  
Clark Atlanta University  
(404) 880-8000