



• *Educator*

TIMELINE

- 1908** – Graduates College
- 1908** – First teaching job in Friendship—8 miles from Plains
- 1912** – Begins teaching in Plains
- 1919** – Becomes principal of Plains High School
- 1928** – Promoted to superintendent
- 1937** – Plains named model school; Miss Julia is superintendent

Julia L. Coleman

1889–1973

Inducted 2001

Julia L. Coleman was one of the first women superintendents in the Georgia public school system.

Born in Nacogdoches, Texas, the daughter of a Baptist minister, Julia moved to Plains as a small child. She attended school there and later went to Bessie Tift College in Forsyth. After graduating college, Julia began her teaching career. Returning to Plains in 1912, she became one of the most beloved educators in the region.

“Miss Julia”—as she was known by everyone in Plains—was a lady of grace, charm and intellect. Growing up visually impaired and lame, she was not able to drive a car and had

“Of all the teachers I have ever had, including those for my studies at four different colleges and universities, Miss Julia has been the one who has done most for me and made the most beneficial and lasting impression on my life.”

– Former U.S. President
Jimmy Carter

to read with a magnifying glass. Physical handicaps challenged but did not stop her. She began teaching English at Plains High School and subsequently became principal. After 15 years as principal, she was named Superintendent of Plains High School in 1928, a role typically reserved for a male.

When she became one of the first female superintendents in Georgia, Miss Julia embraced the position with passion. In 1937 Plains High School was named one of three model schools in Georgia, primarily because of the innovative curriculum developed through her leadership. Because of this designation, graduates of teaching institutions statewide came to Plains to learn from and teach in the model school. Many of Miss Julia’s experimental programs were later adopted by the state school system.

Miss Julia’s contributions to the community went beyond the classroom. Beginning in 1941, she formed one of the first “soup kitchens” in Georgia, which grew into what is now the school lunch program. To beautify

1940 – Invited to White House by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt

1941 – Begins one of the first “soup kitchens” in state; what later becomes school lunch program

1949 – Relinquishes superintendent position; returns to teaching full time

1950 – Serves on state committee to add 12th grade

1956 – Named Georgia “Teacher of the Year”
(3rd district)

1958 – Retires

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the school campus, she started the “Friendship Garden”. Along with the garden she started “Baby Row”, to which she would add a new plant each time a baby was born in the community. In 1950 she served on the state committee to investigate adding the 12th grade to the school system. She also directed plays, coached the debate and literary teams and spent her own money for school supplies and to help meet the needs of various individual students. Her students were always her primary interest and she kept in touch with them after graduation through letters of encouragement.

In 1940 Miss Julia was invited to the White House by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to be recognized for her contribution to education. Thirty-seven years later, President Jimmy Carter, a former student of Miss Julia’s, quoted her in his inaugural address.

In 1949 Miss Julia retired as superintendent, but she continued to teach English in her beloved school. Garnering local, regional and national awards and honors, she eventually retired with 50 years of teaching experience—all but four of them at Plains High School.

The community of Plains was Miss Julia’s family and she expressed her gratitude to the citizens for allowing her to teach their children. With her strong moral character, work ethic and dedication to her profession, Miss Julia Coleman left an indelible mark on the lives of the people of Plains, the residents of Georgia and, through a former student who became president, the world.

Additional Resources

Plains Historical Preservation Trust

Plains, GA 31780
Phone: (229) 824-5445

Jimmy Carter National Historic Site: Visitor Center

300 North Bond Street
Plains, GA 31780
Phone: (229) 824-4104