



- *Educator*
- *Founder*

TIMELINE

1909 – Graduates from Vanderbilt University

1910 – Serves as President of Atlanta Chapter of University Women

1917 – Begins volunteer work with Associated Charities

1920 – Serves as Assistant Secretary of newly founded Georgia Board of Public Welfare

Rhoda Kaufman

1888–1956

Inducted 1998

Rhoda Kaufman grew up in a warm, protective family that encouraged the development of her intellectual abilities. Her high school class thought she would be a famous poetess, but instead Rhoda became a powerful force working on behalf of those less fortunate. She is known for pioneering the use of scientific method and research in establishing welfare systems.

Born in 1888 in Columbus, Georgia, Rhoda lost a leg at age 12 and had to use crutches for the rest of her life. Graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Vanderbilt, she moved to Atlanta where she pursued a career in journalism without success. But as president of the Atlanta Chapter of University Women she became interested in social reform.

From 1913 to 1915 Rhoda led the organization's campaign for funding of a state training school for girls. Next, she went to work for the Associated Charities of Atlanta, leading its successful crusade to form the Children's Code Commission as well as a commission and training school to aid the developmentally disabled. During this period she became increasingly aware that reliable research was crucial to developing programs for the poor.

Rhoda's most productive years came in the 1920s. When the Georgia Board of Public Welfare was established, she was hired as assistant secretary. She was quickly promoted to executive secretary, and under her guidance the department became widely respected for undertaking some of the most progressive reform efforts in the United States. The organization was selected to make a study of crime statistics by prominent jurists such as Roscoe Pound and Louis Brandeis. The study was used as a model for other states, and the standards it developed for children's institutions were adopted by the federal government for use by the U.S. Children's Bureau.

Rhoda's success did not go unchallenged. The resurgent Ku Klux Klan began a bitter campaign against what they referred to as "state and government interference," and tried zealously to abolish the Welfare Department,

1923 – Becomes Executive Secretary of State Department of Public Welfare

1928 – Resigns from Executive Secretary position after slanderous attacks by KKK; resignation effects support on behalf of her cause

1930 – Begins graduate work at Emory University

1932 – Participates in National Conference of Social Work at President Hoover's request

1937 – Becomes active in Social Planning Council of Atlanta

1943 – Voted National "Woman of the Year" in Social Welfare; receives same honor again in 1945

1950 – Serves on National Council for Prevention of

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attacking it and Rhoda at every session of the legislature. A slanderous, anti-Semitic letter circulated in 1928 caused her to conclude that she should resign for the good of the department, citing poor health. In fact, the stress of the attacks did undermine her health for a time, but the efforts of her enemies backfired when the legislature voted to increase social welfare appropriations.

"A profession is an art and a technique. For it to work it must be disciplined by science and enriched by philosophy."
–Rhoda Kaufman

After a period of traveling and graduate study, Ms. Kaufman accepted President Hoover's invitation to take part in a National Conference of Social Work in 1930,

assisting the President's plan to use national experts for a scientific study of welfare conditions in the United States. She also took a position as executive director of the Atlanta Family Welfare Society and the Social Planning Council of Atlanta. During her service with the two organizations she initiated plans for coordinated programs in public recreation, care for the chronically ill, child daycare and mental health.

Rhoda retired in 1938, but she maintained an active interest in social reform until her death in 1956.

Additional Resources

Rhoda Kaufman Collection (papers 1906-1956)
Georgia Secretary of State, Div. of Archives and History
(404) 656-2350