

Stories in Stone: Patty Blackburn Semple

By: Eva Stimson and Gayle Collins, Writing for You

Patty Blackburn Semple was one of only a few leading Louisville suffragists who encouraged African American women to register and vote after Kentucky granted women who could read and write the right to vote in local school district elections in 1912. Many in Kentucky, and throughout the South, argued against women's suffrage because extending the vote to women would enfranchise black women. Semple also promoted literacy among African Americans. As a member and one-time president of the Louisville Free Kindergarten Society, she supported efforts to train teachers and make kindergarten classes accessible to African American children.



Patty B. Semple

Semple's parents were from prominent Louisville families and owned a local hardware store. She moved to Washington, D.C., to marry J. Fred Effinger, a mining executive, but returned to Louisville with her baby daughter after the short marriage ended in divorce.

Semple taught history and literature at the college level and encouraged girls and young women to further their education. In 1893, she founded Semple Collegiate School, a college preparatory school for girls (forerunner of Louisville Collegiate School) and was active in organizations that gave scholarships to young women who entered postsecondary education. She and her daughter and granddaughter all graduated from Vassar College.

The first president of the Woman's Club of Louisville, founded in 1890, Semple was also the first female trustee of the Louisville Free Public Library. During World War I, she served as Kentucky chair of a U.S. Food Administration department that promoted the conservation of food, especially sugar and wheat flour. Authorities in Washington, D.C., proclaimed Kentucky's program the most successful in the country.

Patty Blackburn Semple is buried at Section A, Lot 225 E1/2, Grave 3