

Hester Jeffrey



Born Unknown

Birthplace Unknown

Died 1934

Grave Site Boston, MA

Contribution Organizer and activist in the African-American community.

Hester C. Jeffrey moved to Rochester, New York from Boston, Massachusetts in 1891. She was the daughter-in-law of Reverend Rosewell Jeffrey, an affluent and prominent political activist and the wife of R. Jerome Jeffrey. (She was sometimes referred to as Hester Jeffreys or Hester Jeffries.)

Jeffrey, an untiring organizer and an activist in her own right, became involved in many of the city's associations soon after she moved to Rochester. She was a member of the Political Equality Club and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). In the latter group she held the positions of County Superintendent as well as Secretary of the Third Ward WCTU. She was also Section President of the Needlework Guild of America. In 1897, she was appointed to serve on the (Frederick) Douglass Monument Committee.

The African-American population in Rochester grew substantially between 1900 and 1920. During the same period — starting in the 1890s — African-American women banded together to form clubs and suffrage groups throughout the nation. Jeffrey's activities reflected these trends. She founded or helped to organize a number of local African-American women's clubs among the growing black community in Rochester. In 1902, she organized the Susan B. Anthony Club for African-American women. She also served as its president. While the club's goals were in part philanthropic — its Mothers' Council was created to help mothers with small children — it also advocated suffrage, as its name implies.

Jeffrey was also instrumental in founding the Climbers and the Hester C. Jeffrey Club, organizations for young African-American women. One of the purposes of the Hester C. Jeffrey Club was to raise funds for young black women to take courses at the Mechanics' Institute (which later became the Rochester Institute of Technology).

As the above affiliations demonstrate, Jeffrey built and maintained ties across racial communities in Rochester. Her affiliations with both communities are reflected in the religious sphere as well as in civic and philanthropic organizations. While she often attended the First Unitarian Church and had close ties with Mary Gannett, wife of its prominent minister, she maintained an active membership in the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion church, and served on various committees there.

Jeffrey's activities as a clubwoman assured her a state and national as well as a local presence. In 1902, she spoke at a Buffalo, New York convention of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), a group

founded in 1896 by such prominent African-American leaders as Harriet Tubman, Rosetta Douglass Sprague (daughter of Frederick Douglass), Frances Harper, Mary Church Terrell and Ida Wells Barnett.

In 1905, Jeffrey represented the New York Federation of Colored Women (NYFCW) at a New York State Woman Suffrage Association (NYSWSA) convention. The same year, as president of the NYFCW, she presented its annual report when the group met in Rochester.

Jeffrey was also a friend and associate of Susan B. Anthony, and was chosen to give a eulogy at Anthony's funeral, in 1906. There, she shared the platform with William Channing Gannett (minister of the Unitarian Church), Rochester Mayor James Cutler, Rush Rhees (president of the University of Rochester), and nationally known suffragists Carrie Chapman Catt and Reverend Anna Howard Shaw. Jeffrey's eulogy reflects her many affiliations and activities: