

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Helen McDowell

PERSON

McDowell, Helen, 1903-2010

Alternative Names: Helen McDowell;

Life Dates: September 28, 1903-July 17, 2010

Place of Birth: Abingdon, Virginia, USA

Residence: Washington, District of Columbia

Occupations: High School English Teacher

Biographical Note

Born on September 28, 1903, in Abingdon, Virginia, Helen Newberry McDowell was the fourth of fourteen children. Her mother, Caroline, was orphaned in Cleveland, Ohio, and raised by her uncle Frank Donahue in Abingdon, where her mother met her father, Samuel.

McDowell attended Morristown Industrial School, where her mother taught, and went on to Bennett College. Graduating in 1924, she attended Teacher's College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. McDowell then attended Howard University from 1928 to 1931, earning her M.A. in education.

McDowell began teaching in 1925, and after earning her M.A. went on to teach at Morgan State University in Baltimore. In the 1940s, McDowell bought six houses in Washington, D.C., and converted them into rooming houses for students. These buildings became known as the Newberry House and from 1949 to 1973, was the home to hundreds of students from Howard University's School of Religion. McDowell also ran a wedding salon out of Newberry House. McDowell began teaching at Phelps Vocational High School in Washington, D.C., in 1950, and taught English there until her retirement in 1973. She then moved to California with her husband but relocated to Washington D.C. in 1993. McDowell continues to teach.

Related Entries

Kings Mountain School [STUDENT OF]
[from ? to ?]

Morristown College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Bennett College for Women [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A.

Howard University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Master's

Newberry House [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Board of Education [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Morgan State University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1931 to ?]

Phelps Vocational High School [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1950 to 1973]

Teacher

National Council of Negro Women [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]