



## The Nannie Helen Burroughs Project

*(a values and vision initiative)*

[www.nburroughsinfo.org](http://www.nburroughsinfo.org)

### Burroughs (1870-1961) – A Timeline Sequence of Her Life’s Work:

1879: Born in Orange, Va., near Charlottesville, Va. Her father was an itinerant minister, who was never gainfully employed. She had an older sister who passed when she was very young. Her father passed and Burroughs’ mother brought her, at age five, to Washington to live with relatives and start a new life. Her mother worked as a domestic.

1884-1896: I can find no information about this period of her life. In 1896, she graduated from M Street School, now known as Dunbar, where she was an above average student. The school concentrated heavily on the languages, which seems to be the reason for her great oratorical skills. She only wanted to be a school teacher, but was turned down for a position. She seems to credit it to her being of “Dark Skin”. This disappointment stoked the fires for her to declare that one day she would start a school in Washington for Negro Girls.

1897: She moved to Philadelphia and took a job with the Baptist Church. After a year the headquarters moved to Louisville, Kentucky.

1898-1997: She started a school in Louisville for Negro women, which seemed to be a precursor for what was to come with her school in Washington. While there she took courses at a business college and received an honorary degree. There is no evidence of any other formal education. In 1944, Shaw University in Raleigh, NC gave an Honorary Doctorate Degree. Her views about higher education are discussed in the essay and explain why the education at her school was called Bi-lateral, reflecting a combination of the views of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois.

1900: While in Louisville, she showed up at the Baptist Convention in Richmond, Va., where she managed to get herself on the speaking schedule. She gave the speech which launched her onto the national scene, “How the Women are being Hindered from Helping”. She was instrumental in raising the status of women in the Baptist Convention by establishing a Women’s Auxiliary.

1901: She was elected as secretary to the auxiliary, a position she held until 1947.

1902: She traveled 32,000 miles doing the work of the Women’s Auxiliary. Among her travels was the Baptist Convention in Birmingham, Alabama, where the convention had Du Bois on the agenda as keynote speaker. She lobbied the convention and persuaded them to allow Booker T. Washington to speak between the afternoon and evening sessions. A 1902 Birmingham newspaper article gives an account of the happenings on the evening, when more than one

hundred people were killed trying to exit the church in what was thought to be a fire. It subsequently became known as the National Baptist Convention "Booker T. Washington Night".

1905: Her work in the Baptist Church earned her the keynote address position at the first congress of the Baptist World Alliance, the overarching Baptist organization in the world. Eighteen thousand people showed up in Hyde Park Corner, London, where people gather on Sunday afternoons to give their views on an array of topics. The Daily Express newspaper quoted one of the 'oratorical gems of this twenty-six year old African-American: "It is useless to telegraph to heaven the shiploads of blessings and no one to be on the wharf to unload the vessels when they arrive".

1907: She started Women's Day in the Baptist Church. Some years later, circa 1925, Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York, told his Sunday audience of 500 that a day in the year should be named after Nannie hen Burroughs, because the churches had raised significant funds from Women's Day and her play, The Slabtown Convention. She responded in essence that she did not want a day named in her honor. Further any contributions should be sent to her school in Washington, DC. Burroughs declared that she had started Women's Day to teach women how to be leaders in the community, but the preachers have them dressed up, with baskets in their hand, prancing up and down the aisles begging for money.

1909: She opened her school with her friend, Mary McLeod Bethune, as the guest speaker. Bethune became one of the most recognizable women in the country, particularly for her association with Eleanor Roosevelt. Bethune started the National Council of Negro Women, later headed by Dorothy Height, and was responsible for Black women in the military, through Mrs. Roosevelt. Burroughs, Bethune and Charlotte Hawkins Brown later became known as "The 3 B's of Education".

1911: She was the main speaker at the second Baptist World Alliance Congress in Philadelphia, with 3,000 people were in attendance.

1911- 1929: Burroughs raked up her words/speeches/dialogue on Black Women's Suffrage, politics, discrimination and cooperation between the races, plus serving on many housing and employment committees, appointed by President Hoover.

1930: She was denied membership in the American Automobile Association (AAA), with the association returning her a check for the \$12.00 membership fee.

1934: Burroughs was among the first women to give the commencement speech at Tuskegee University. She challenged the graduates, during that period of unemployment, to go out find new ways accomplish needs of the country.

1940: She was appointed to the Advisory Panel of Listeners to the National Broadcasting Company. This was the path to her presenting a national radio address in 1943 to "US Fighting Men". In this address, she challenged the country to finally, after 75 years since emancipation, give the Negro his rights as a first-class citizen. However, she challenged the Negro to take

responsibility for this opportunity. Burroughs always advocated for Opportunity, Responsibility and Challenge.

1947: She was elected President of the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention and served until her death in 1961.

Subsequent to her death, little mention has been made of the achievements and contribution of Burroughs, as she seems to have been virtually lost to history. However, in 1975 Mayor Walter Washington declared May 10 as "Nannie Helen Burroughs Day" in Washington, DC, and a street in her neighborhood (Deanwood - Ward 7) was renamed in her honor. Most recently, in 2014, the AAA visited the Washington Metro Area and presented Burroughs the membership denied in 1930.