



Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry

(b.1872-d.1943)

Fredericka Douglass Sprague was born on August 9, 1872 in Rochester, New York, the daughter of Nathan and Rosetta Douglass Sprague and the granddaughter of famed abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. She attended public school in Washington, DC, and then the Mechanics Institute in Rochester, New York. She moved to Jefferson City, Missouri

where she taught home economics at Lincoln University. She married Dr. John Edward Perry in 1912, founder of the Wheatley Provident Hospital (previously called the Perry Sanitarium), the first private hospital for Black people in Kansas City. She moved to Kansas City to work with her husband at the hospital providing better health care to children suffering from poor nutrition and showing signs of developmental delays.

As an activist and philanthropist, she organized the Wheatley-Provident Hospital Auxiliary No. 1 and first raised the idea of a fashion show as a benefit for the hospital. She also organized the Beacon Club, which raised money to purchase land north of the hospital as a home for nurses. It was at the hospital that Fredericka also began working as a juvenile court worker where she witnessed the harsh treatment of dependent Black children who were often placed in state institutions. Her works as a juvenile court reporter opened her eyes to the many issues confronting the community. She would go on to advocate and recruit foster parents for Black children and youth in need. In 1923, she initiated the formation of the Missouri State Association of Colored Girls, sponsored by the senior women's association. Kansas City was one of the first cities to have such a group. In 1928, the Kansas City Urban League organized the Big Sisters Association with the goal of placing girls in foster homes. Perry was president of the Big Sisters Association. The main interest at the time was in starting a home for girls from broken homes and preventing future delinquency. In 1934, with the help of the Kansas City Federation of Colored Women's Club and other prominent African Americans in the community, she founded the Colored Big Sister Home for Girls. The Colored Big Sister Home existed until 1943, when the state began to provide services for Black children. Perry organized and served as supervisor of the Missouri State Association of Club Women for sixteen years.

Perry also helped found the Civic Protective Association in Kansas City, served as a trustee of the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association, and was a member of the John Brown Memorial Association

Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry died on October 23, 1943 and is buried in Highland Cemetery, Kansas City, MO.

Note: Various birth years are given. Her Missouri death certificate (No.37453) located on the Find a Grave website lists her birth year as 1880. However, the 1880 Federal census shows her to be eight years of age in 1880 making her birth year 1872. Various other birth years are also found.

Sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fredericka_Douglass_Sprague_Perry

<https://people.bu.edu/wpeebles/hpswbc/>

Social Welfare History Project (2011). Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry (1872-1943): Child welfare pioneer. *Social Welfare History Project*. Retrieved [date accessed] from <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/people/perry-fredericka-douglass-sprague/>