



# Josephine Silone Yates

(b.1859-d.1912 )

Alexander and Parthenia Reeve Silone in Mattituck, NY. Varied birth years are noted; however, Josephine A. Silone is found in the 1865 New York census and 1870 federal census with a reported birth year of 1859. Josephine Silone was the first Black student to graduate from Rogers High School in Newport, Rhode Island where she graduated as valedictorian of the class of 1877 and received a medal for scholarship. Josephine then attended the Rhode Island State Normal School in Providence to become a teacher. She graduated in 1879, with honors, the only Black student in her class. In addition, she was the first African American certified

to teach in the schools of Rhode Island. She later received a Master's degree from the National University of Illinois.

Following graduation (1879), Silone moved to Jefferson City, Missouri to work as one of the first Black teachers to be hired at Lincoln University. She taught chemistry, elocution, and English literature. She was subsequently promoted to head of the Natural Science department reportedly becoming the first Black woman to head a college Science department.

In 1889, Josephine Silone married William Ward Yates. During this era, many schools prohibited married women from teaching, so upon her marriage, Josephine Silone gave up her teaching position at Lincoln and moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where her husband was the principal of Wendell Phillips School. In 1902, Yates was recalled by the president of Lincoln Institute to serve as the head of the department of English and history and later as the advisor to women at Lincoln. Upon her husband's death in 1910, she returned to Kansas City, Missouri.

Josephine Silone Yates found an outlet for her intellectual skills and civic consciousness in the Black Women's Club Movement. Yates is said to be the driving force behind the founding of, and the first president of the Women's League of Kansas City, an organization of African American women dedicated to self-help and social betterment. In 1896, The Women's League joined the National Association of Colored women (NACW), a federation of similar clubs from around the country. Yates became the NACW's second president from 1901-1904. She previously served with the NACW for four years as the treasurer or vice-president from 1897 to 1901. Among the objectives included in the NACW Mission is "To secure and use our influence for the enforcement of civil and political rights for African Americans and all citizens". By 1911, Yate had helped found the first Black YWCA in Kansas City.

Yates had a great impact on the women's club movement, especially in Missouri where a number of clubs, such as the Josephine Silone Yates Art Clubs of Sedalia, were named in her honor. In her role as President of the NACW, Yates was given many opportunities to speak and write on the subject of racial uplift. She frequently contributed to the African American publications of the era, such as *Woman's Era*, *Voice of the Negro*, the *Indianapolis Freeman*, and the *Kansas City Rising Son*. Yates wrote while teaching. She penned newspaper and magazine articles often under the alias R.K. Potter. Her writing also included poetry.

Citing the hard work of Josephine Silone Yates, noted activist Anna Julia Cooper speaking at World's Congress of Reprehensive Women in Chicago, about the Colored Women's League, stated, "The branch in Kansas City, with a membership of upward of one hundred and fifty, already has begun under their vigorous president, Mrs. Yates, the erection of a building for friendless girls.

Josephine Silone Yates was involved in clubs and organizations that fought for racial and social change.

Josephine Silone Yates died in Kansas City on September 3, 1912.

Sources:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephine\\_Silone\\_Yates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephine_Silone_Yates)

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/yates-josephine-silone-1852-1912/>

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