

# Gertrude Amelia Mahorney

*Indianapolis, Marion County*

Gertrude Amelia Mahorney became the first African American woman to graduate from an Indiana college or university when she received a bachelor's degree from Butler University in 1887. Two years later, she was awarded a master's degree from her alma mater. While at Butler, Mahorney was confronted with the social segregation of the day, but "stood on her merits and...won the regard of students and professors."

Born in Indianapolis, Indiana at the close of the Civil War, Gertrude Mahorney was the daughter of John Todd Mahorney and Ann Elizabeth Gray Mahorney. Her father owned an ornamental hair (wig) business on Illinois Street near the prestigious Bates House and was active in the antislavery National Negro Convention movement. In the late summer of 1877, Gertrude Mahorney traveled with her family to England for a year of study. She lived in London's East End and had many opportunities to interact with people of diverse backgrounds. Upon the family's return to Indiana, she resided in the Indianapolis suburb of Irvington so that she could eventually attend Butler University.

Proficient in the German language, Gertrude Mahorney translated stories that were subsequently published in local newspapers. She began her teaching career at Indianapolis Public School No. 23, a school for "colored" children living in the near northwest side of the city, and later taught German at another nearby "colored" school, IPS No. 24. Mahorney resigned her teaching position in the fall of 1906 to study in Pittsburgh and teach at Avery College & Trade School in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. When she returned to Indianapolis, she was only offered a substitute position in IPS. Unable to secure a permanent teaching position, she left Indianapolis in September 1910 to become the teacher in charge of the Ohio Street Colored School in Rockville, Indiana. Depending on enrollment, over the next four years Gertrude Mahorney was often the only teacher at the school.

The story of Gertrude Amelia Mahorney is unfinished; the known public record of her life ends in 1914. Butler University honored her at a recent Founder's Day program with the presentation of her restored graduation photograph.

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This profile was provided to ICW by Steven R. Barnett, Marion County Historian, Indiana Historical Society/Indiana Historical Bureau.

For more information about Gertrude Mahorney, go to: <http://www.irvingtonhistorical.info/gertrude-mahorney.html>

*References will be published at the end of Women's History Month.*



Photo Courtesy: Steven Barnett

