



## Janie Porter Barrett

1865-1948

Hanover, Education Activist

A teacher by training, Janie Porter Barrett was a social reformer and pioneer in bringing instructional training to underprivileged African-American girls. Janie was raised in Macon, Georgia, in the home of a white woman who employed her mother as a domestic. In 1884, she graduated from Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, and worked as a teacher in Georgia. She returned to Virginia to marry a fellow Hampton Institute graduate, Harris Barrett, in 1889. Shortly after, Barrett began her career as a social and educational activist. At the end of the nineteenth century, social reformers motivated many middle-class women of all races and ethnicities to help the less fortunate in their communities. On her own initiative, Barrett sought financing to expand

her programs, and in 1890 she established the Locust Street Social Settlement, one of the first settlement houses for African-Americans, providing social services for needy women, children, and the elderly. By 1902, the Barretts erected a separate building on their property to house the clubs, classes, and recreational programs of the settlement.

In 1908, she helped found the Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and served as its president until 1932. Through the federation she raised more than \$5,000 to buy a farm in Hanover County and open a residential school for African-American girls who had been incarcerated. The Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls, which opened in 1915 with Barrett serving as superintendent, set the rehabilitation treatment standard as a leader in humane social work. Barrett carefully placed girls in foster homes, found them jobs, and offered personal support and counseling. The school was ranked as one of the five best institutions of its type in the United States by the Russell Sage Foundation. In 1920, Virginia assumed the financial responsibility for the school and in 1942, took on sole responsibility.

Barrett possessed remarkable skill in working with individuals of other races. In particular, her alliance with Mary Cooke Branch Munford, a well-known white Richmond clubwoman and activist, led to increased funding for educational programs for African-Americans and resulted in stronger ties between black and white clubwomen than anywhere else in the South. She was able to secure funding for her work from the Virginia General Assembly and was successful in raising money from both white and African-American communities. She was active in the Virginia Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Richmond Urban League.

Her work did not go unrewarded. In 1929, she received the William E. Harmon Award for Distinguished Achievement Among Negroes. Barrett retired in 1940. Her legacy, however, was not forgotten. Two years later, the school she built was renamed the Janie Porter Barrett School for Girls and in 1975 was renamed the Barrett Learning Center which is still serving young women today.