

Lillian Ward McDaniel

1902-1981

Richmond, Educator and social Activist



Lillian Ward McDaniel was a devoted educator and social activist who dedicated her life to tearing down the walls built by segregation. Born in Richmond, Virginia, on February 4, 1902, she was the first child of James Henry Ward and Willie Hankins Ward. Her parents' emphasis on the power of Christianity and education led McDaniel to become a lifelong learner in the classroom and in the church. After earning a bachelor's degree from Virginia Union University, and a master's degree and professional diploma from Columbia University, she pursued additional studies at Temple University, Richmond Professional Institute (now Virginia Commonwealth University), Boston and New York Universities, the University of Virginia, and the University of Hawaii.

As the wife of Leonard Eugene McDaniel and mother of five children, Lillian spent her life teaching children basic academic skills as well as the value of community service. She taught in Dunbar, Blackwell and Franklin Richmond Public Schools from 1923-1971. She believed that acquiring a quality education was the key to becoming productive citizens, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic background. She argued that African-Americans could achieve despite the constraints of Southern segregation laws, and she dedicated herself to making the point by example. Serving as a liaison for the Red Cross, which at the time was a white service organization, she supported Junior Red Cross programs in many African-American schools. The idea was for children to help identify other families in need, teaching them to extend a helping hand, even when they themselves faced adversity. In 1946, she received a certificate from the American National Red Cross, signed by President Harry S. Truman, in recognition of meritorious personal service performed. Additionally, she researched the impact of school achievement on crime and was instrumental in rewriting the public school curriculum based on her studies. In 1968, she was recognized and honored by Richmond's Mayor Crowe for her contributions to the city's public schools.

Her dedication to community and interracial relations motivated her to take a leadership role beyond the schools, in numerous civic, political, fraternal, religious, and professional organizations, often using her position to build a bridge between black and white communities. Among other achievements, she was named Virginia's African-American Mother of the Year in 1956. In 1960, McDaniel, a member of the Virginia Teacher's Association Executive Committee, attended the White House Conference on Children and Youth as the representative of the National Association of College Women, an organization for which she later served as national president. McDaniel's contributions were recognized in 1978 when she was named Woman of the Year by the National Association of University Women.

Lillian McDaniel spent a lifetime promoting academic excellence, positive human relations, and community service. She died on January 29, 1981. To continue her legacy of learning, two higher education scholarships are awarded each year in her name to graduating seniors in need of financial assistance - one by the National Association of University Women (Richmond Branch) and one by the Richmond Ladies' Fellowship Bible Class.