

## Sarah Ella Wilson (1873-1955)

Sarah Wilson was the second African-American teacher in the Worcester schools, after Jennie Clough Busby. She graduated from Classical High about 1891, earned her teaching diploma from the State Normal School, graduating with the 34<sup>th</sup> class in January, 1894, and began teaching at Belmont Street School that Fall. She taught first grade there for 49 years, retiring in 1943.

As a tribute to Sarah, a small book about her was written by Corrine Bostic in 1974, sponsored by the YWCA, entitled *Go onward and upward: An interpretive biography of the life of Miss Sarah Ella Wilson*. Of particular interest are reminiscences of Sarah by her niece, Louise G. Wellmon, written specifically for the book, and it has some nice photographs, including one of the Wilson family posing in formal 19<sup>th</sup> century style, and a shot of Sarah with one of her first grade classes, circa early 1900s. Long out of print, it can be found at the Worcester Public Library in the local history and genealogy section (#830.81).

Another source on Sarah Wilson is William S. Coleman III, "Worcester's first African-American school teachers: Jennie Cora Clough and Sarah Ella Wilson," *InCity Times*, June 15, 2009, available online [here](#).

The Wilson family was the subject of a more extensive treatment by Prof. Janette Thomas Greenwood of Clark University in her 2009 book, *First Fruits of Freedom: The Migration of Former Slaves and Their Search for Equality in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1862-1900*. Greenwood examined the migration of former slaves to Worcester and Worcester County during and soon after the Civil War, with considerable attention to their circumstances here, both positive and negative.

Sarah's parents were George M. and Elizabeth (Ray) Wilson, both of whom were born into slavery in Virginia. After the war they married and then moved to Worcester with the assistance of Sarah and Lucy Chase, sisters who were active in the education and assisted migration northward of freed slaves during and after the war. George established his own business in paper-hanging and whitening (today's painting), and was followed in that by one of his sons and by one of his grandsons.

Janette Greenwood provides a good discussion of the many activities of Sarah Wilson directed toward education, racial equality, care for aged African-Americans, and women's associations. Some of those endeavors are noted in her death notices below.



Courtesy of Clarence Wilson

The Wilson Family  
Standing: left to right, James, Sarah, Charles. Sitting: left to right, Anna, Mrs. Elizabeth Wilson, Mr. George Wilson, Elizabeth. Front sitting: Alexander.



**MISS SARAH E. WILSON**  
Taught 1st Grade 49 Years

### **Sarah E. Wilson Dies; Teacher Since 1894**

Funeral services for Miss Sarah Ella Wilson, 82, of 4 Pelham street, who died Tuesday in her home, will be held at 2 p. m. Friday at Longstreet Colonial Chapel. Burial will be in Hope Cemetery. Calling hours at the funeral home are 2 to 5 and 7 to 9 p. m. Thursday.

Miss Wilson was a public schoolteacher in Worcester 49 years. She taught the first grade at Belmont Street School from October, 1894, until her retirement in July, 1943.

## **Sarah Ella Wilson**

*Evening Gazette*

Nov-02-1955

She was a graduate of Classical High School and Worcester Normal School. She was born in Worcester, daughter of the late George M. and Elizabeth (Ray) Wilson.

She was one of the founders of the Home for Aged Colored People and formerly served that organization as vice-president and auditor. She was also treasurer of Northeastern Federation of Women's Clubs for 25 years and was a member of Levana Club, Women's Service Club of the YWCA, Worcester Inter-Racial Council, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She attended St. Andrew's Methodist Episcopal Church.

She leaves two brothers, Charles H. Wilson of Philadelphia and Alexander W. Wilson of Worcester; a sister, Mrs. Elizabeth M. Brevard of Worcester, and six nieces and four nephews.

On page one, a distinct honor:

Telegram, Nov-02-1955

## **Sarah Wilson Dies; Teacher 49 Years**

Miss Sarah Ella Wilson, 82 of 4 Pelham street retired Worcester school teacher, died in her home Tuesday.

In the 49 years she was a member of the Worcester school system, she taught the first grade at Belmont Street School. She retired 12 years ago.

She was a graduate of Classical High School and Worcester Normal School. She was born in this city, daughter of George M. and Elizabeth (Ray) Wilson.

She was one of the founders of the Home for Aged Colored People and formerly served that organization as vice-president and auditor. She was also treasurer of the Northeastern Federation of Women's Clubs for 25 years and was a member of the Levana Club, the Women's Service Club of the YWCA, the Worcester Inter-Racial Council, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She attended St. Andrew's Methodist Episcopal Church.

She leaves two brothers, Charles H. Wilson of Philadelphia and Alexander W. Wilson of Worcester; one sister, Mrs.

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(remainder lost)