

EMILY GRIFFITH

When: 1868–1947

Where: Born in Cincinnati, moved to Denver in 1894.

Why Important: She believed that everyone had the right to an education. She founded The Emily Griffith Opportunity School, which helped make this possible for many people in Denver.



EMILY GRIFFITH

Emily Griffith was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on February 10, 1868. She grew up very poor. Griffith left school after the eighth grade to help support her family. At the age of seventeen, she took a job as a teacher in a sod house school in Nebraska. To reduce living expenses, she lived with students' families for weeks at a time. Griffith realized that many of her students' families were uneducated. They were unable to read, write, or do simple math. Griffith believed that an education was the only way to lift people out of poverty. An education would allow parents to provide a better life for their children.

In 1894 Griffith's family moved to Denver. She taught first as a substitute teacher and then as a full-time teacher. Griffith became the Deputy State Superintendent of Schools in 1904. She served for six years, leaving twice to go back to the classroom to work with students before returning to her post.

Griffith also began teaching night classes for adults. She believed that everyone deserved an education regardless of age, race, gender, or background. In 1916 Emily's dream came true when she opened the Opportunity School! Emily was very dedicated to her students. She gave them food and money for the streetcar, visited the ill, and worked with the police to help children in trouble with the law.

Griffith retired in 1933, after 100,000 students had attended her school. That same year, the Opportunity School was renamed The Emily Griffith Opportunity School in her honor. Today the school is a technical college within the larger Colorado Community College System. It is also affiliated with the Denver Public Schools as an alternative high school.

When Griffith retired, she moved to Pinecliff, Colorado to live with her sister. On June 18, 1947 the two women were found murdered. The crime remains unsolved to this day. In 1976 she was honored with a stained-glass window portrait in the Colorado State Capitol Building. In 2000 Mayor Webb honored Griffith with a Millennium Award designated for a person who "made the most significant and lasting contributions to the citizens of Denver since its founding."

Sources:

"Emily Griffith Opportunity School." Denver Public Schools. The History of Denver Public Schools. http://www.dpsk12.org/aboutdps/history/dps_history_griffith.shtml