

## Nettye Edith (Pierson) Riffe

Biography by Sara McKinley



Nettye Edith Pierson was born 17 March 1882 in Marion, IN to parents Hezekiah Taylor Pierson and Josephine Jones and grew up in Muncie. She attended Jackson School, and at age 12 participated in a program to honor George Washington. Nettie was described as a refined and bright young woman in school. At the Junior Reception her class hosted to honor the Seniors of her high school, she was dressed elegant as ever in mousseline de sole (silk muslin) trimmed with all-over lace and green velvet ribbon (green and white being the Junior class colors). She was already a highly respected young woman when she graduated from Muncie High School in 1902 and was prominent in church circles. Nettie went on to study at Ball State College, a distinguished accomplishment for women of color in the early 1900s. She married George Luther Riffe on 17 May 1905 at the home of her parents on S. Plum St., and the couple became neighbors to her parents. She had one younger sister, Adah R. Pierson, who married Joseph B. Timberlake. It is said that Nettie was also active in the women's suffrage movement locally. Nettie enrolled 2 summers at Wellesley College to study social welfare. She attended various YWCA trainings during her time as

secretary and later Executive Director of the Phyllis Wheatly branch of the YWCA. Nettie utilized her training to focus especially on helping girls become well-rounded young women and went on to co-found the E. First St. YWCA branch for girls. During her 20 year tenure at the YWCA, membership grew to nearly 400. Nettie died at age 68 on 2 January 1951 in Muncie and is buried in Beech Grove Cemetery. In 1955 the First Street Center YWCA held a memorial program, and a tree was planted in her honor.

