

## Dr. Mary E. Britton (1855 – 1925)

Mary E. Britton was born in Lexington, Kentucky on April 16, 1855. She attended Berea College between 1871 and 1874. From 1874, until she went to medical school, she taught at several segregated public schools in the Lexington, Fayette County area.

Dr. Britton found that many people, especially African Americans, were denied health services in established hospitals, and decided to dedicate her life to providing good healthcare. She studied medicine and graduated from the American Missionary College in Chicago, Illinois. In 1902, she obtained a license from the city clerk to practice medicine, becoming the first African American woman physician in Lexington.

She practiced medicine from her home at 545 North Limestone Street. Her services provided much needed medical care to African Americans with serious health problems. She specialized in hydrotherapy, the use of water in the treatment of disease, and electrotherapy, the use of electricity in disease treatment. After almost twenty years of medical practice, she retired in 1923.

In addition to being a teacher and physician, Dr. Britton was an outspoken social activist. She wrote newspaper articles for the *American Citizen*, the *Daily Transcript* and the *Lexington Leader*, arguing against racial segregation laws. She organized and attended rallies in support of desegregation. One such rally was the 1906 demonstration in Frankfort against separate railroad coaches for people of color.

Dr. Britton played many other important roles. She was active in the women's rights movement in Kentucky, she served as secretary to the board for the Colored Orphans Home, a large institution, which housed orphans and the elderly, and she was president of the local Woman's Improvement Club.

Dr. Britton died in 1925, at the age of 70, and is buried in Lexington's Cove Haven Cemetery.



(Courtesy of the Berea Special Collections and Archives)