

# Mary Townsend Seymour

1873-1957 | Community Leader & Suffragist

Mary Townsend Seymour was born in Hartford on May 10, 1873. She had seven older siblings, but her parents both died when she was still young. After her parents died, Mary went to visit the Hartford Hall of Records, where official documents were kept. She wanted to make sure that her name was correct on her birth certificate. Mary valued herself as a person, and she taught many African American men and women to value themselves and their rights too.

In the early 1900s, many African Americans moved from the South of the United States to the North in search of better opportunities. Mary saw discrimination all around her in Hartford and worked to make life better for people in her community.

In 1917, she and her husband, Frederick, invited a group of people—black and white, men and women—to their house. Together, they formed the first branch of the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People (NAACP) in Hartford. Mary did a lot of work to keep the organization running and was the public spokesperson. She worked with groups that helped black soldiers and their families and fought against racial segregation and poor housing. She went “undercover” in disguise to report on unfair treatment of black women working in tobacco warehouses in Connecticut.



The only known photograph of Mary Townsend Seymour, printed in *Hartford Courant Sunday Magazine*, Sunday, September 14, 1952

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107-1100-1114-188-001-1908

Date, MAR 23 1916  
 Name, Mary T Seymour  
 Residence, 470 West Bulfinch Ave  
 Place of Birth, Hartford Ct  
 Date of Birth, Age, 21  
 Occupation,  
 By whom employed,  
 Date of Naturalization,  
 Reason for Tax Exemption,

Mary Townsend Seymour's voter registration card, courtesy Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library

Mary knew that African Americans were not the only people discriminated against in the United States. She wanted women to be able to vote. The right to vote is called "suffrage" and the people who fought for that right are called "suffragists."

Mary did not like that most of the big suffragist groups would not let her join

because she was black. She worried that these groups would not fight to make sure African American women were included in the right to vote. She helped make sure that black women were not left out when the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution passed in 1920, giving women the right to vote.

Mary became one of the first women to run for public office after the 19th Amendment passed. She was the first African American woman to run for the Connecticut State Assembly. She did not win, but she had fought all her life to make sure that she—or anyone—could have the chance.

For more information, visit:

<https://chs.org/mary-townsend-seymour/>

<https://www.cwhf.org/inductees/mary-townsend-seymour>

<https://www.ctexplored.org/audacious-alliance-mary-townsend-seymour/>

<https://connecticuthistory.org/video-mary-townsend-seymour-tribute-film/>

<https://todayinhistory.com/2019/01/12/january-12-mary-townsend-seymour-civil-rights-champion/>