

Hester Jane Black (1872–1934)

One of the First Five Pupils of the Dakota Territorial School for the Deaf and Mute

Hester Jane Black (March 1872 – June 20, 1934) was one of the First Five Pupils of the Dakota Territorial School for the Deaf and Mute, now known as the South Dakota School for the Deaf (SDSD). Her enrollment places her among the earliest deaf students to receive formal education in Dakota Territory.

Born in Iowa to Adam Perry Black and Sarah Ann Miller, Hester was living in Sioux Falls, Minnehaha County, Dakota Territory, by 1880. The 1880 United States Census records her residing with her sister in the home of the S.D. Lemonds family during the foundational period of the school.

As one of the First Five Pupils, Hester played a role in the beginning chapter of organized deaf education in Dakota Territory.

On May 23, 1899, she married John William Schemenauer, a deaf man from Emerson, Nebraska, in a ceremony held at the school campus. This event is recognized as the first recorded wedding of a former pupil at South Dakota School for the Deaf.

Hester and her husband later lived in Nebraska, Iowa, and Wisconsin. They had five children: Rollie, Levi, Violet, Marian, and John. Several of their children were deaf and attended schools for the deaf, continuing the family's connection to deaf education into the next generation.

Hester Jane Black Schemenauer died on June 20, 1934, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from pneumonia. She was buried at Greenwood Cemetery in Superior, Wisconsin.

First Class of Students



First class of students at the Dakota Territorial School for the Deaf and Mute, Sioux Falls, c.1881. Hester Jane Black is believed to be among the pupils shown.