

Missouri Road Trip

Every Hero Has A Story: Susan Blow

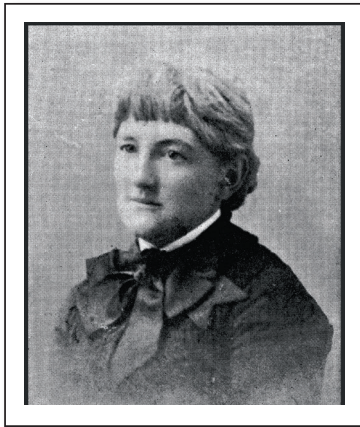
How much do you remember about kindergarten? You likely recall the fun, but probably don't realize the profound impact that first year of school has on your life.

Fortunately, Susan Elizabeth Blow understood the importance of early childhood education, and her efforts established kindergarten learning in the United States.

Born to a wealthy family in St. Louis in 1843 (her family later lived in the Carondelet neighborhood), Susan didn't have to work, as many young people of her time did. She focused on her education. A governess taught her at home, and she attended private schools in New Orleans and New York.

While Susan was in New York, the Civil War began, her school shut down and she returned to her family home in St. Louis.

While traveling in Germany, Susan was introduced to the idea of kindergarten, an idea pioneered by German educator Friedrich Fröbel. As The State Historical Society of Missouri notes, "In these 'kindergarten' classrooms, Blow noticed that young children learn important language, math and science skills by playing with objects such as balls and blocks. She decided that children in America should have this kind of instruction, too." The rest, as the saying goes, is history.



Back in the U.S., Susan studied different ways of teaching kindergarten and eventually convinced the superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools to allow her to start a kindergarten program. In September 1873, Susan opened the country's first public kindergarten classroom at the Des Peres School in Carondelet.

Within 10 years, every school in the St. Louis Public School System had a kindergarten. Susan directed kindergarten programs for 11 years for no pay and is credited with establishing a model for schools around the country. Susan Blow lectured across the country up until her death on March 26, 1916.

Points of Interest

- ★ Susan was inducted into the Hall of Famous Missourians in the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City in 1983.
- ★ Susan was the granddaughter of Captain Peter Blow, an owner of Dred Scott, who later challenged the slavery issue in court.
- ★ Ulysses S. Grant appointed Susan's father, Henry Blow, as minister to Brazil in 1869, and Susan went with him as his secretary. She quickly learned Portuguese, and helped her father ease trade communications between Brazil and the U.S.
- ★ Learn more about Susan Blow on The State Historical Society of Missouri's Historic Missourians site, shs.umsystem.edu.
- ★ Many newspapers cover the communities of St. Louis, including The Riverfront Times, riverfronttimes.com, and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, StLToday.com.

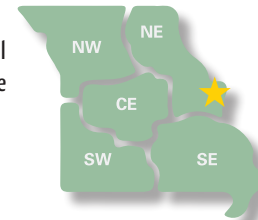
Sources: State Historical Society of Missouri, Carondelet Historical Society, Hall of Famous Missourians



Carondelet Historical Society Museum
6303 Michigan Ave.
St. Louis • 314-481-6303
CarondeletHistory.org

Take A Road Trip to St. Louis!

You can learn more about Susan's work and life with a visit to the Carondelet Historical Society Museum. It is located in the same building as the Des Peres School Susan founded in 1873. The school was the first publicly funded kindergarten in the United States. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Susan Blow Kindergarten Room is located on the building's first floor and is restored to its 19th century appearance. Numerous exhibits focusing on local history fill the building, including "Fröbel's Gifts," educational materials developed by the German creator of



the kindergarten movement. You can also see a tribute to Susan Blow and many other famous St. Louisans on the St. Louis Walk of Fame. Located in the Delmar Loop district, the sidewalks feature brass stars and plaques with information summarizing the honorees' achievements and connection to the city. More than 140 stars are featured on the Walk of Fame – all available for viewing at no charge all day every day! Learn more at StLouisWalkofFame.org.