

## **SITE OF THE BRYAN PUBLIC SCHOOL FOR COLORED<sup>1</sup>**

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c. 1975

*Bryan Public School for Colored, 1885 to 1930*

*Washington Elementary School, 1930 to September 16, 1971, when destroyed by fire and was not rebuilt. This was a continuation of the Bryan Public School for Colored using the same facilities, but limited to elementary colored children.*

On March 30, 1885, during the administration of Major John W. Tabor, Mayor, the City of Bryan purchased lots three (3) through ten (10), except lot 5, of block 56, City of Bryan, for \$200 from F.A. Rice and William R. Baker as a site for a public school for the Colored to provide separate but equal and impartial instruction for the Negro children of the community as prescribed by the State constitution of 1876. This was the first school to be established exclusively for Negroes in Bryan, and for many years it served as the high school for all Negro children in Brazos County. The establishment of the school represented a determined effort on the part of the citizens of Bryan to provide for the education of the Colored youth of the community.

The school site contained originally seven (7) of the ten (10) lots in block 56 of the 640 acres set aside and platted as the City of Bryan by William Joel Bryan, nephew of Stephen F. Austin, out of League 9, located in northern Brazos County. In 1952 the Bryan Independent School District purchased from the Negro Woman's Club of Bryan the three (3) remaining lots in block 56.

The school was in operation from the Fall of 1885 to September 16, 1971, and was located between East 19<sup>th</sup> and East 20<sup>th</sup> Streets, and between North Houston and North Preston.

The school was established to meet the requirements of the State Constitution of 1876 and of the state laws of 1883 and 1884. The cornerstone for the Bryan Public School for Colored was laid in the Spring of 1885 and the school opened its doors in the Fall of that year. The Mayor of Bryan at the time the school was established was Major John W. Tabor. The first principal of the school was A.H. Colwell who had recently arrived in Texas from Louisiana. Colwell was a graduate of New Orleans University, an institution supported by the Freedmen's Aid Society of the United Methodist Church. He was said to have been, at that time, one of the four best educated Negroes in Texas, and was soon to become a recognized Republican leader in Texas.

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<sup>1</sup> The marker was approved with the title, "Black Education in Bryan."

A.H. Colwell (c) of Brazos County was nominated by the “Regular” (as contrasted to the “Reform”) Republican State Convention meeting in Dallas, August 28-29, 1894, as its candidate for the office of State Superintendent of Instruction, but failed to win election. At the McKinley Republican Convention in Austin, March 26, 1896, he was named one of the two Republican presidential electors from Texas. He served as a member of the Committee on Platform and Resolutions at the Republican State Convention in Fort Worth, August 16-18, 1898, and as Chairman of that Committee at its convention on March 6-7, 1900, in Waco. In the 1898 and 1900 listing of his name in Ernest W. Winkler (ed.), “Platforms of Political Parties in Texas” (*Bulletin of the University of Texas*, 1916, no. 53; pp. 405-411) the name is shown as A.H. Caldwell of Brazos County. Colwell later returned to Louisiana.

The second school principal was Pal Landry; the third, E.A. Kemp; the fourth, R. Neal; the fifth, Edward H. Knox; the sixth, Lon Nash; the seventh, Thomas Cole; and the last, O.W. Sadberry.

The first teachers were: Mrs. Anne Alberson; Mrs. Lenora Green, a graduate of Fisk University and a classmate of Dr. William E. B. Du Bois; Miss Mamie Barrows; Miss Beatrice Calhoun; and Mrs. Ada Scott Hall.

Grades taught, at first, were 1 through 10; and when the state school system changed to an eleven-grade system, the Bryan Public School for Colored became an eleven grade school; and, finally, in 1940-41 it became a twelve grade system in conformance to state law. At first, the primary interest was upon reading, writing, and arithmetic. Latin was taught for several years in grades 7-11. Among the first graduates of the school were Tim Phillips, Tee Goosby, Eva Goosby, Bailey Bowens, Viola Bowens, Jennie Hall, Ada Ridley, Charlie Duren, Lisa Haynes, Tommie Haynes, Willie Haynes, William Ford, Perry Ford, Emma Ford, and the Johnson children.

During the administration of Major John W. Tabor, Mayor, the City of Bryan purchased on March 30, 1885, from F.A. Rice and William R. Baker, the then Mayor of Houston, Texas, for \$200 lots 3 through 10, except for lot 5, block 56, City of Bryan, being part of a 640 acre tract acquired April 9, 1860, by William R. Baker and Abram Groesbeeck (*sic*) of Harris County, directors of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, from William Joel Bryan of Brazoria County, nephew and heir of Stephen F. Austin, the empresario, for \$3,200. William J. Bryan inherited league number 9, the westernmost of two leagues of land in what became Brazos County that had been granted by the Mexican government to Stephen F. Austin. In 1883 Baker purchased an interest in the *Houston Post*. He was also President of the City Bank of Houston.

In 1952 the Bryan Independent School District purchased from the Negro Woman’s Club of Bryan the three (3) remaining lots in block 56.

The original structure of the school building was a two-story frame structure, with offices on the first floor and an auditorium on the second floor<sup>2</sup>. There were no seats. Planks supported by kegs served as seats. The building was destroyed by fire in 1914, and pending the construction of a new building, classes were held temporarily at Allen Chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Lee Chapel of the Methodist Church, and at Shiloh Baptist Church.

In 1915 a new one-and-a-half story brick school was completed on the site of the original structure. In 1930 Kemp Junior-Senior High School (colored) was built on the West side of town, and the Bryan Public School for Colored became Washington Elementary School. The Washington Elementary School was destroyed by fire on September 16, 1971, and was not rebuilt. No school occupies the site today, but in 1974 a new building occupying less than one-fourth of the site was constructed to house the Special Services Department of the Bryan Public Schools, and the remainder of the block has been developed by the City of Bryan's Parks Department as Washington Park, a neighborhood playground.<sup>3</sup>

For many years this was the only public school for Negroes in Bryan, and for a long time it was the only high school for Negroes in Brazos County. The principal of the school acted as "superintendent" and reported directly to the school board until more recent years.

The Bryan Public School for Colored no longer exists under this name.

Prominent persons who have been connected with the school as well as exemplary former students of the school include:

A.H. Colwell – already mentioned

Charlie Duren – became an outstanding pianist who played in all parts of Texas.

Marshall Williams – a graduate of the school, was one of the first Blacks to serve in the United Nations.

McKinley Thomas – graduate, Harvard fellow, lawyer; was once State Chairman of the Republican Party in Texas; was on the platform at San Francisco when the United Nations was founded. Was the first Black man on the H.E.W. Council appointed by

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's Note: Marginal notes on file copy: "Another passage shows there were school rooms or a school room on first floor. Such early schools rarely had offices, per se, although it is possible this one did. Another passage shows there were school rooms or a school room on first floor. DP 1/22/1975" The initials "D.P." most likely are those of Deolece Parmelee, who worked for the Texas Historical Commission for many years.

<sup>3</sup> Editor's Note: Since the time this document was written, the property has become the home of the Brazos Valley African American Museum.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower. He organized the East Bay Transit Savings and Loan Association, Oakland, California, and when he died his brother Lawrence C. Thomas, a preacher in Chicago, came out to manage the Association.

Dr. Lawrence C. Thomas – Assistant to Bishop of the U.N. Methodist Episcopal Church of Missouri. He was later President of the East Bay Transit Savings and Loan Association in Oakland, California, organized by his brother, McKinley. Lawrence C. Thomas is now retired.

K. Carl Thomas – Baptist preacher, Houston, Texas.

Mrs. A.Q. Thelma Keatts Adams – music teacher in Bryan; works for Caldwell Jewelry Company, Bryan, Texas.

Mrs. J.L. Thomas – taught English in high school; Sadie Thomas Park is named after her.

Washington Elementary School (formerly Bryan Public School for Colored) burned September 16, 1971 and was not rebuilt, for Bryan now has a totally integrated public school system.

It is desired to give recognition to the school attended by so many Negroes in Bryan and Brazos County between 1885-1971; to keep that spot sacred and as a historical spot to be remembered as a place where there once was a school where so many Blacks in the community received their education for better living and better citizenship. “A community without a memory is a community without a soul.”

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Leon Hayes, Bryan Independent School District, Bryan, Texas

J.L. Thomas, 708 North Houston, Bryan, Texas

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Noah Dansby, 801 Esther Blvd., Bryan, Texas. Former City Secretary.

Dr. Jay Williams, Parks Dept., Bryan, Texas

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