

Lincoln School Black Education in College Station¹

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Many black citizens settled in Brazos County as a result of slavery. In 1864 there were 2,013 slaves in Brazos County, during this time period formal education did not exist. Formal education for blacks began in Brazos County in 1871 as a result of the passage of the Public School Act of 1871.²

Education for black citizens, who resided in the 55 square mile area which now constitutes the A&M Consolidated School District of College, in the late 1800's and at the beginning of the 1900's, was provided by a network of small area schools. In 1910 there were 39 buildings in which black schools were located throughout Brazos County. Twenty-two of the buildings were rented and seventeen were owned by the public. Many were small 1-4 room buildings and were often located in or near black churches. The scholastic enumeration papers submitted to the State Education Agency by the A&M Consolidated School District noted that black students were attending schools at Shirock, Union Hill, Wellborn, College Independent, and Dowling and Providence.³ One hundred twenty-seven students attended classes at the various black schools in the A&M Consolidated School District in 1923.⁴

In 1928 black schools located in the A&M Consolidated School District included Peach Creek, Sulphur Springs, Wellborn, Shirock, Dowling and Providence, Union Hill, Washington Chapel, and College Hills.⁵ For the next 15 years the number of students attending classes grew steadily and by 1938, 246 students were attending classes. All of these schools were elementary schools. The A&M Consolidated School District which did not have a black high school had an agreement with the Bryan Independent School District to allow students to attend Kemp High School in Bryan. The tuition fees for students who attended Kemp High School were paid for by

¹ Editor's Note: Marker was approved as "African American Education in Texas."

² Buford Michael Dwain, **Up From Cotton**, Bryan, Texas, 1988.

³ A&M Consolidated School District Scholastic Enumeration and School Board Minutes, 1923.

⁴ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, 1923.

⁵ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, 1929.

the A&M Consolidated School District. The district also provided a bus for transportation to Bryan for the students.⁶

In the 1930s the number of black students that attended high school in the district steadily increased, and as well as the cost of tuition and transportation for the students to Kemp High School. As a result of these continuing rising costs and in an effort to provide a more comprehensive education to the black scholastic population of the district, discussions pertaining to constricting a black high school for the school district began. On January 8, 1941, the A&M Consolidated Board of Trustees initiated discussions about the need for a black high school in the District. Arguments for the construction of a high school included: the significant savings over time in tuition and transportation costs, and encouraging more area students to attend high school.⁷ The board decided to build facilities for a black high school in College Station. A bond election was held on March 29, 1941, to acquire capital for building this school, among other projects.⁸

The site was selected for the school and five acres were purchased from the Matthew and Fanny R. Davis estate for the sum of \$100 per acre.⁹ The site which was located at the southwestern city limits of College Station is now bordered by Eleanor and Holleman streets. Plans for the school progressed rapidly and the school opened its doors for the 1941-42 academic year. Initially, the school consisted of a building containing six classrooms, a principal's office, and a homemaking cottage.¹⁰

A curriculum for the black high school, which was initially known as A&M Consolidated Negro School, was adopted. Courses approved by the school board included: English, History, Negro History, Practical Arithmetic, Elementary Science, Vocational Agriculture, Industrial Shop, Home Economics, Defense Training Work, and Training for adult maids.¹¹ E. M. Cunningham was selected as the principal for the school. Mr. Cunningham also served as the Vocational Agriculture teacher; other faculty

⁶ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, 1938.

⁷ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, January 8, 1941.

⁸ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, March 31, 1941.

⁹ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, May 8, 1941.

¹⁰ Lincoln Center in College Station: Essential Elements of Programming for Minorities," page 16, Texas Recreation and Park Society.

¹¹ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, June 24, 1941.

members were They Myrtle Owens, Edna Harris Yarrow, Willie A Yarrow, A. J. Thompson and Ruth Cunningham.

Elementary schools located within College Station, as well as those from outlying areas, were moved to the new school. Grades 1-11 were established in 1941 and grade 12 was added the next year. The first graduates from the new school received their diplomas in 1942. They were Lola V. Robison, O. B. Townsend, Ethel Mae Eaton, Clarence Burrell, Dan McGill, and Dora Jewel Townsend.

The school continued to flourish and expand. In 1945 it was noted in a serial published in **The Battalion** that the black school for College Station had a budget of \$15,000 annually. It employed 10 teachers and 296 children attended school that year.¹² A small plot of additional land located one block from the original school site was purchased from Edward V. and Birdie Beatrice Hrdlicka on October 13, 1945 for \$600¹³. This land was designated to be used as a football and athletic field for A&M Consolidated Negro School.

On June 13, 1946 the name of the school was changed from A&M Consolidated Negro School to Lincoln School.¹⁴ Willie A. Tarrow was named as the school new principal. In 1947 the Vocational Agriculture and Industrial Shop class under the guidance of the Vocational Agriculture teacher expanded the shop building by building an additional room.¹⁵ The material for this project was acquired by dismantling buildings at the old Minter Springs school site.

Attendance at the school grew rapidly and citizens of the city were concerned about the school cramped facilities. Specifications for anew High School Building on the Lincoln campus were drawn and submitted by R. G. Schneider, Architect and Engineer, on December 1, 1948.¹⁶ This building endeavor was a portion of an overall expansion of A&M Consolidated facilities in 1948. In February 1949, C. L. Andrews was awarded the

¹² Hughes, W. L., "Your City, Eighth of a Series," **The Battalion**, August 12, 1945.

¹³ Deed from Edward V. Hrdlicka and Birdie Beatrice Hrdlicka filed in the State of Texas, County of Brazos, 1945.

¹⁴ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, June 13, 1946.

¹⁵ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, October 7, 1947.

¹⁶ General Contract Specification for Facilities for the A&M Consolidated School District submitted to the A&M Consolidated School Board, December 1, 1948.

building contract for the four-classroom building which was to be located west of the elementary school building.¹⁷

Lincoln School served as the social hub of College Station black community and at least for a short period of time as a spiritual meeting place. The College Station Church of Christ requested and received permission from the school board to use rooms on the campus as a meeting place on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday or Thursday nights. In return the congregation agreed to reimburse the school district for the utilities costs and any additional janitorial services required.¹⁸

The Lincoln campus growth continued in an effort to better serve the community. The construction of tennis courts for the Lincoln campus was a topic of discussion by school board members during the spring of 1950. This proposal was approved by the A&M Consolidated School Board in May 1950.¹⁹ Expansion of the school continued throughout the 1950's. The A&M school board discussed future construction for Lincoln campus throughout the fall of 1950. On June 14, 1951, bids for an industrial arts shop and science building were taken and the building was completed in April 1952.²⁰

A number of milestones and events occurred involving Lincoln School in 1953. In January, bids for the construction of a Gymnasium were opened. The specifications for the gymnasium included the requirement of piers for future expansion of the building and room for construction of a stage and dressing rooms.²¹ Public School Week in 1953 was observed at the school with festivities that included a radio program and an open house. Progress on the establishment of a library for the school continued throughout 1952 and 1953. On September 4, 1953, Lincoln School was accredited by the State Department of Education.²²

¹⁷ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, February 9, 1949.

¹⁸ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, March 5, 1951.

¹⁹ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, May 20, 1951.

²⁰ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, June 14, 1951, and April 17, 1952.

²¹ A7M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, January 5, 1953.

²² A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, September 1954.

As the focal point of the community grew the personality of the school developed. The school colors were purple and gold and the mascot chosen for the school was the panther. The school motto was, “Forward forever, backward never,” and their school song was, “O’ Lincoln High.”

O’ Lincoln High

O’ Lincoln High we love you true.
We love the purple and gold too.
To you we will always be true.
O’ Lincoln High how we love you.
The purple and gold mean much to me.
Let’s try to keep our colors true,
We pledge a better school to be,
O’ Lincoln how we love you.

As the school grew the area that could be used as an athletic field was found to be inadequate. In 1956 discussions concerning a possible trade of 80,000 square feet of property owned by the school district with a 120,000 square feet parcel owned by the Hrdlicka heirs.²³ The land trade was completed on February 11, 1957. A&M Consolidated paid the Hrdlicka estate \$10.00 for the additional square footage.²⁴ This trade allowed the athletic fields to be located adjacent to the school and to be more readily accessible to students. Expansion of the school continued with the addition of a homemaking cottage. Bids for the construction of the homemaking cottage were announced on July 17, 1956.²⁵

Discussions on plans for integration of the A&M Consolidated School District began on June 15, 1956.²⁶ This was the first of a series on ongoing meetings and seminars on the subject. It was decided to adopt a “wait and see attitude.”²⁷ In the early 1960s the A&M Consolidated Independent School District received notice that the National Association for the

²³ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, July 8, 1956.

²⁴ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, February 11, 1957.

²⁵ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, July 17, 1956.

²⁶ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, June 15, 1956.

²⁷ A&M Consolidated School District, School Board Minutes, January 14, 1957.

Advancement of Colored People was requesting immediate integration of College Station schools. The plan for integration adopted by the school district was a stair step method.

Under this plan the black elementary grades would be fused with white elementary grades one grade at a time. Every year a new grade would leave Lincoln and become integrated. Attendance at Lincoln became voluntary. Two of Lincoln's teachers were reassigned to A&M Consolidated High School and several white teachers were relocated to Lincoln. Teachers for special education and speech taught at both schools. By 1965 grades one and two had been phased into the A&M Consolidated school system.

On January 20 1966 a fire at Lincoln School was reported to the Texas A&M University Fire Department. At the time the fire started an adult education class was being held in one of the buildings. The fire department was notified at 7:45 p.m., however the first truck did not leave the fire station for 15 minutes. A second and third truck were dispatched 10 minutes later.²⁸ These delays were unexplained in all existing documents. The trucks were also hampered in reaching the fire by large crowds that gathered to watch the fire. The fire, whipped by high winds, was well established by the time the firefighters reached the scene. Once the firefighters arrived, the blaze was contained in about an hour and no deaths were reported. The ten classroom high school building, principal's office, teachers' lounge and library were destroyed. Buildings that were not damaged included the gym, two classrooms, auditorium, assembly hall, homemaking cottage, cafeteria building, science laboratory, and industrial arts shop. The damage to the Lincoln School complex was estimated at \$65,000 and displaced 100 students.²⁹ The majority of records and documents pertaining to the school were destroyed in the fire. The cause of the fire was never determined. Although it was speculated that the fire may have been set to force integration to occur more quickly,³⁰ a search of the

²⁸ Texas A&M University Fire Department, Dispatch Logs, January 20, 1966.

²⁹ "Damage Totals \$65,000," "Lincoln School Blaze Displaces 100 – Plans Studied Today," **Bryan Daily Eagle**, Friday, January 21, 1966.

³⁰ Balliew, Deborah Lynn, **The City of College Station 1938/1988**, page 43, Intaglio Press, College Station Texas, 1987.

local newspaper revealed a number of mysterious fires were set by an unknown arsonist during that time period.³¹

High school students were transferred to A&M Consolidated High School. The 38 students in grades three, four, and five returned to class at Lincoln the Monday following the fire. Grades six, seven, and eight also attended Lincoln School, but reverted to a departmentalized program with a seven period day. These lower grades remained at Lincoln due to space limitations at the other schools in the Consolidated system. Teachers from the school were reassigned.³²

At the end of the 1965-66 school year, Lincoln's doors were shut and the remaining students were integrated into the other A&M Consolidated schools. The school Board decided that it was not feasible to rebuild the burned facilities.

In 1967, the City of College Station discussed what could be done with city property that was adjacent to Lincoln. An informal agreement was made by the city and school district to temporarily use the school property as a city park.³³ The buildings remained unused, except for the occasional gatherings of small church groups. In 1968, the school board agreed to lease the land and facilities at Lincoln to the city for a period of 10 years. The City Council directed the Parks and Recreation Committee develop detailed plans for the property and buildings.³⁴

In 1969 the College Station Parks and Recreation offices were located at Lincoln. The facilities were used for continuing education classes and served as a neighborhood recreation center. City property adjacent to the school was used for an all purpose sports field. The homemaking cottage served as the Parks and Recreation Department Office and the industrial arts shop was converted into a shop for the department.³⁵

³¹ Various articles from the **Bryan Daily Eagle**, January 19, 1966, through February 1, 1966.

³² Consolidated Board Shuffles Pupils, **Bryan Daily Eagle**, Monday, January 24, 1966.

³³ City of College Station, Council Minutes, April 19, 1967, and April 24, 1967.

³⁴ City of College Station, Council Minutes, February 26, 1968.

³⁵ City of College Station, Council Minutes, January 15, 1969, February 24, 1969, and March 24, 1969.

The property was renovated and restored in 1972. In 1978, the city bought the land from the school district and the facilities were entirely refurbished. On June 6, 1980, the Lincoln Center was officially dedicated and began to serve as a tribute to the school that once stood on the site. Lincoln Center serves as a home for many community activities, the local Boys and Girls Club, a senior outreach program, immunization program, and an emergency management site.

The memories and influence of Lincoln School remain. The Lincoln school trophies are displayed at the Center. The Lincoln Former Students Association was formed in 1982. The association, which is comprised of students who attended Lincoln School, holds biennial reunions. The association activities include providing scholarships for black students and preservation of the history heritage and memories of Lincoln School.

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