

Coleman College

Coleman College was organized in the year 1885 in Palestine Missionary Baptist Church, where school was held two years. Each year the commencement exercise was held under a "Brush Arbor" right beside the church. The school took its name from the founder, Oliver Lewis Coleman (O.L. Coleman), or President Coleman, as he was often called by the community people, students and teachers.

In 1887, the school moved to its present site. The school was a private school.

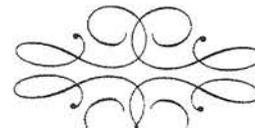
O.L. Coleman was the School Master President from 1885-1927. He was in a car accident in March of 1927 and died three days later. The tragedy took place Friday evening. He passed away the following Sunday night. This caused much sadness and mourning in the community, among the faculty and students.

His son, Monroe McVicker Coleman took the helm and carried out the rest of the session. Rev. L.D. Scott of Shreveport was one of the graduates; he was valedictorian of the class.

The Board met and chose M.M. Coleman as succeeding president of the College, beginning in the Fall of 1927. The school faced much difficulty: hard times of the years took their toll. The school was closed the year of 1933-34.

Rev. Roy A. Mayfield (who had previously been president of a private school in Homer, Louisiana), took the helm in the Fall of 1934.

He moved Coleman College to Shreveport in 1937, where it is still functioning to train ministers.



Site of
COLEMAN COLLEGE
1887 - 1937

• Oliver Lewis Coleman,
Founder and President, 1887 - 1927

Monroe McVicker Coleman,
President, 1927 - 1934

Roy A. Mayfield,
President, 1934 - 1937

GIBSLAND - COLEMAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, 2013



Home Mission Society of NY
Boston 2016
1887
129 yrs.

USA

Coleman College was easily one of the greatest Negro Baptist Schools, not only in Louisiana, but in the South. This institution, beautifully situated in Gibsland, Louisiana on one of the most picturesque red clay hills in the state, was the life-work of Professor Oliver Louis Coleman. Like many devoted Negro leaders of his time, after struggling to obtain an education, Professor Coleman gave his time and dedicated his efforts to the cause of education for Negroes.

Professor Coleman was born in Canton, Mississippi in 1857 the son of slaves. In 1887, Coleman, a recent graduate of Alcorn A&M College in Lorman, Mississippi, arrived in Gibsland, Louisiana. **He found all of the northern part of the state, a territory two hundred miles wide and three hundred miles long, in which there were no teachers or preachers in the true sense for his people. In fact, the only school that looked forward to intellectual and Christian training in the state outside of New Orleans had been organized at Baton Rouge.** Upon his arrival in Gibsland, Professor Coleman was readily accepted by the Palestine Baptist Church family. He organized what he called an "Evergreen" Sunday School in the church, where he was allowed to hold daily classes. At first the school offered courses for 1st thru 8th grades.

In 1889 the school was moved to the site where Gibsland-Coleman High School now stands. That same year Professor Coleman's wife, Mrs. Mattie E. Coleman moved from Mississippi and joined him as the school's music teacher. **In 1890**, with ten students, Coleman College, originally named Coleman Baptist Male and Female College, opened its doors to educate the children of nearby freed slaves. The institution organized primarily to produce teachers and preachers, became the first institution of higher learning open to Blacks in North Louisiana.

The school's beginnings were humble. The first classes, with students ranging from 30's to 40's, were held in one lone frame building. Students sometimes paid tuition with produce from the farms. Palestine Baptist Church offered such assistance as it could afford to the struggling young school, as did many other churches across North Louisiana. Eventually, the churches formed an organization, the Springville Missionary and Educational Association to support the College.

Unexpectedly, a Rockford, Illinois man, the late C.R. Moore, who owned property around Gibsland, including the 10-acre site of the college's frame building, donated the site to the school. This benevolent act, however did not end the school's financial worries. Professor O.L. Coleman had always believed in prayer. His initial dream was to provide training for Black preachers and teachers. Legend has it that at this point he prayed so fervently under a certain tree that this tree bowed its head in an attitude of prayer. At any rate, shortly after this intense prayer period, the American Baptist Home Mission Society in Boston, Mass. decided to provide Coleman College with an annual grant.

Important
In 1908, the first brick buildings, manufactured from the hill's store of red clay were constructed, with a Mansfield, Louisiana brick maker in charge, assisted by the students, and the people of Gibsland. By 1914, the campus consisted of two three-story brick buildings; one two and a half-story building; and two two-story frame buildings.

By the 1920s there were several brick buildings on the campus, and the school prospered greatly. At the height of its existence, Coleman College owned some 100 acres of which ten were devoted to educational purposes. There were eight buildings which included classrooms, an

1937
1939 Moved to Shreveport

auditorium, dormitories, and an administration building. The studies included courses in algebra, geometry, Latin, English, music, chemistry, and Bible study. The college also offered a choir, glee club, and intercollegiate athletics. Nicknamed the Bulldogs, Coleman College's chief athletic rival was the historically black Grambling College Tigers in Grambling, Louisiana in Lincoln Parish (subsequently Grambling State University).

In 1927, Professor O.L. Coleman was fatally injured in an automobile accident near Delta Point, Mississippi. His son, McVicker Monroe Coleman took the helm and carried out the rest of the session. The Board met and chose M.M. Coleman as succeeding president of the college beginning in the Fall of 1927. The school faced much difficulty. Hard times of the years took their toll and the school was forced to close the year of 1933-34. Rev. Roy Mayfield (who had previously been president of a private school in Homer, Louisiana) took the helm in the Fall of 1934, serving as the third president from 1934-1937.

Enrollment at Coleman College reached as high as four hundred in some years. Before its closure in Gibsland in 1944, the institution had added to the church over 600 souls and sent to the world over 1000 Christian teachers, graduates and preachers. Among its graduates were the first president of Southern University in Baton Rouge, Dr. J. S. Clark, and Ada Bell Lewis Coleman. Ada Coleman was the mother of Mildred Coleman Marks, Geraldine Coleman Gaillard, McVicker Monroe Coleman, Jr., and Georgia Coleman McClaron

Later in 1944, Coleman College re-opened for another decade in Shreveport. By 1946, the trustees had made the last payment on property in the Mooretown community at 3701 Hollywood Avenue, the current location of Winnfield Funeral Home. Decreased enrollment caused the school to close once again in the middle 1950s.

A few years after the closing of the college in Gibsland, the site was acquired by the Bienville Parish School System and now is home to Gibsland-Coleman High School.

Excerpt from Baptist Missionaries and Pioneers Sketches Written by Mary C. Reynolds and Others

CHAPTER II

SISTER MOORE AND COLEMAN COLLEGE

by

Mrs. Mattie Coleman, Gibsland, La.

Prof. Coleman's wife

President Coleman came to Louisiana in 1887. He found all of the northern part of the state a territory two hundred miles wide and three hundred miles long, in which there were no teachers or preachers in the true sense for his people. In fact, the only school that looked forward to intellectual and Christian training in the state outside of New Orleans had been organized at Baton Rouge, by Sister Moore. I came to the state about 1889, from Jackson, Miss., and joined Mr. Coleman as his music teacher. Being in a dark and strange land, young and inexperienced, we needed counsel, encouragement, inspiration, comfort and prayer. We got all of these from Sister Moore. During his second year in the state, Mr. Coleman got his first and greatest inspiration from a ten days' Bible Institute conducted by Sister Moore at Simsboro, La. He thought that her Biblical instruction and Christian Ught were the greatest he ever felt from a human being. He returned to his work

(19)

20 Baptist Missionary Pioneers

with new vigor and inspiration. She was a constant visitor to Coleman College until she left the state. In fact, she held the torch light of Christianity by which we moved during the first five years of the institution. I remember very vividly a day of fasting and prayer that she set apart for Coleman College. We met in the old church where the College was founded by Dr. Coleman. She had us read the Bible, talk and pray from 9:00 a.m. till dark. Then the Holy Spirit seemed to overshadow us, and we continued in prayer till ten at night. I caught new inspiration from this meeting which proved to be my greatest asset as a coworker with Mr. Coleman in the establishment of the school.

After we had operated the College five years its growth in every phase made it necessary that

*Copied from
College research
done by
Mrs. Maselaw (Green)
and late husband
about 1972-73
Home # (318) 263
8775*

Chapter 3

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLEMAN COLLEGE

The educational plight of Negroes, in Louisiana as well as other Southern states - before and after the Civil War, was more pronounced than that of Whites. Educational opportunities for Negroes were largely the result of the efforts of Northern church organized missionary societies and other benevolent societies (17:339).

Devoted Negro leaders, after struggling to obtain an education, gave their time and dedicated their efforts to the cause of education for Negroes. Often with little more than faith in God, Negro leaders set out to establish schools to help uplift their fellowmen. One such leader was the founder of Coleman College.

Oliver Louis Coleman, the founder of Coleman College, was born in Canton, Mississippi; the son of slaves. The approximate year of his birth was 1857 (6).

Having been born in Mississippi, one of the slave holding states, Coleman saw some of the many disadvantages suffered by Negroes because of lack of education. He saw Negroes have to sign their names by marking x's. He saw people of his race suffer because of the lack of schools, books, and finance. Coleman saw members of his race yearn for an education but have to abolish the idea because educational

opportunities were not available to them. He also witnessed inadequacy in the development of schools for Blacks. The future looked bleak for Negroes; so Coleman, determined to help his people, acquired an education and used his achievement as a spring board to help others.

Educational experiences of Oliver Louis Coleman included attending high school in Livingston, Mississippi; Alcorn College, Alcorn, Mississippi; further study at the University of Chicago and Chatauta University. He also received an honorary Master of Arts degree from Leland College (6).

Professor Coleman was a family man. He married Miss Mattie Perkins of Lorman, Mississippi. She too was interested in helping to mold the future of her race. She served as a faculty member of Coleman College (6).

Into this union four children were born. The oldest, a daughter named Olive studied at Fisk University; the second child was a son named McVicker Monroe who now resides in Minden, Louisiana; the third child, a daughter named Zenobia now resides in Washington, D. C.; and the fourth child, a son named Alfred who died at an early age (6).

Interviews revealed that O. L. Coleman, as he was usually known, was a religious man. This quality manifested itself in his concern for his fellowman and his work in the churches.

Perhaps of interest here are two legends reported which seemed congruent with the religious nature of Coleman.

One of the legends was that Professor Coleman had a special tree where he knelt to spend a portion of each day meditating with God. As the years passed the tree swayed to one side as if it were praying. The tree became known as the "tree of prayer". The second legend concerned the natural development of a spring which supplied water for the college when a drought caused the campus well to cease to furnish water. Community people, Black and White, suffering from the effects of the drought asked Coleman to pray for rain. He, the faculty, and students observed periods of fasting and praying for rain. Then early one morning as Coleman was out walking, as he usually did, he saw a flow of water emerging from a spring that could not have been there before. This spring, considered an answer to their prayers, became the source of water for the college.

In 1887 Coleman went to Gibsland, Louisiana. Gibsland, a small rural town in North Louisiana, appeared to be a promising area for him to start a school. Gibsland looked promising because it offered access to a railroad, the Vicksburg Shreveport and Pacific; and educational opportunities for Negroes needed to be made available. He talked to people and got an idea about the financial and educational status of the Negro inhabitants of Gibsland. He found the status of both low but this did not deter Coleman's determination to found a college.

Upon arrival in Gibsland, Mr. Coleman inquired about a church and found his way to Father Mellon's home. Father

combined efforts of many people. Illustrative of the combined efforts were statements made during an interview with Mr. McVicker Coleman. He recalled from talks with his father and personal recollection that:

Poor God-fearing people out of their meager holdings gave liberally; sometimes all they possessed. Individuals who had no money to contribute gave their time and labor to aid in erecting buildings. . . . Many Baptist Ministers gave; those who had no money used their influence to get people to help.

No complete list of the faculty could be compiled but Hicks, in his book- copyrighted in 1914, listed the faculty. They were: President, O. L. Coleman; Associate President, J. D. Stewart; A. L. Yates, A. B.; O. W. Gray; C. R. Dickerson, Principal District Department; T. J. Jordan; Bishop P. B. Lewis; Mrs. Mattie A. Coleman; Mary Clay; Rosa Lewis and Katie Smith. A 1916 diploma issued by Coleman College listed the faculty. As listed they were: O. L. Coleman, A. M.; J. D. Stewart, B. A.; A. L. Yates, A. B.; O. W. Gray; A. J. Johnson; M. A. Coleman, B. S.; L. E. Buggs; and M. W. Stewart.

Information on the curriculum prior to 1899 was not obtained; but Mrs. Bernice Bailey recalled that in 1899 it included: Algebra, Geometry, Rhetorics, Latin, English, Music, Chemistry and Bible study.

Bible study was a part of each student's daily experiences. Several alumni of Coleman College said that no school day was begun without Bible study and prayer.

Vocational aspects of the college included learning

to make bricks and working on the school's farm. Mrs. Essie Sims, an alumna of Coleman College, recalled: "Professor Coleman taught student how to mix, shape, and cure bricks. The bricks were cured in a kiln which he had helped students build." According to Mr. McVicker Coleman the bricks used in erecting the buildings were those made on the campus.

Extra-curricula activities included revival meetings, debates, choral groups, and speakers were secured on occasions. Various Baptist Ministers were brought in to speak during revival meetings. Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee Institute, spoke at the college between the years 1912 and 1914. The exact year of Washington's visit was not recalled by persons interviewed. Mrs. Essie Sims, a student at the time, remembered the occasion. She said:

When Booker Washington came to Coleman a platform was built on the outside because the chapel was not large enough. . . . People were everywhere, they came from many places; both Black and White.

Also included in the extra activities during the later years were football and baseball (15).

Evidence regarding the length of the school session during the first ten years of operation was not obtained; but Mrs. Bernice Bailey recalled that the length of the session was eight months (October - May) when she attended in 1899. Session length was later increased to nine months (14).

According to information secured through interviews, gradation followed the same pattern as other early educational followed. Starting with the elementary level, gradation continued upward until it included two years of college work.

Negro Baptist Associations and Organizations in Louisiana were paramount sources of financial support for the college; several of which are listed on the cornerstone from the main building of Coleman College. Those listed are the Gum Spring Association, the North Western Association, the Liberty Hill Association, the Sunday School Convention, the Number One District, and the Alumni Association. The above mentioned cornerstone is presently displayed on the Coleman High School campus.

Fees paid for tuition, room and board provided another source of support; but was a small amount. Mrs. Bernice Bailey, a student in 1899, recalled that tuition was \$1.60 per month while room and board was \$5.50 per month. A student in 1932 recalled that tuition had increased to \$1.75 at that time.

Another means of securing aid was the "missionary work" engaged in by faculty members and students. This missionary work was described by a participant, Mrs. Nulon Williams. She stated:

We would visit various churches and get permission to speak on behalf of the college. We would tell about the good work being carried on by the college. When we had finished the Pastor would ask the congregation for contributions to aid in fostering the good work of Coleman College.

Out-of-state financial support in the form of monetary gifts was secured in much the same manner as was used in securing aid for Tuskegee Institute. Hicks, in his book on page 203, listed as other sources of out-of-state support

the Home Mission Society of New York, the Home Mission Society of Boston, and the United States Government Bureau of Agriculture.

Scholarships were in the form of work-aid. Interviews revealed that students were allowed to perform chores to help finance their education. They worked in the dining hall, cleaning and cooking; they helped to gather wood; some worked on the farm; and others performed janitorial services.

The work of Coleman College, organized and operated in Gibsland, Louisiana, was felt in various parts of the state. Being a teacher training institution, Coleman College sent out graduates who worked in other early Negro Educational Institutions while others also founded schools. Supporting evidence was found in Hick's book. The book includes a short biography of a Professor R. E. Jacobs. It reports Jacobs as being a student at Coleman College in 1897 and being the founder of Sabine Normal and Industrial Institute Converse, Louisiana, in 1903. Also included as being a graduate of Coleman College was Dr. J. S. Clark; the founder of Baton Rouge College and later the President of Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

President O. L. Coleman passed away on April 29, 1927, and his son, McVicker M. Coleman became the new president of Coleman College.

Coleman College continued to operate and expand under the administration of President M. M. Coleman until 1934.

In 1934, the college closed due to the financial effects of the depression years.

In 1936, Mr. Roy A. Mayfield reopened Coleman College. The major emphasis of the college under the administration of Mr. Mayfield was ministerial preparation. In 1939 the school moved to Shreveport, Louisiana. It operated in Shreveport for a short period of time; but has now ceased to operate.

Though Coleman College as an institution of learning no longer exists, education on the same site, in Gibsland, continues today. Upon the grounds where once stood privately financed Coleman College today stands publicly financed Coleman High School.

Coleman College, hampered by inadequate financial resources, did much to enhance and enrich the lives of many people. Its merits and value should be long remembered by an appreciative society.

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2. Cline, Rodney. Pioneer Leaders and Early Institutions in Louisiana Education. Baton Rouge: Louisiana Claitors Publishing Division, 1969.
3. Cornerstones presently displayed on the campus of Coleman High School.
4. Hicks, William. History of Louisiana Negro Baptists and Negro Baptist Beginnings in America. Nashville, Tennessee: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1914.

Interviews:

5. Mrs. Bernice Bailey, a student at Coleman College in 1899 and presently residing in Grambling, Louisiana. May 3, 1971.
6. Mr. McVicker M. Coleman, second president of Coleman College and the son of President O.L. Coleman. He presently resides in Minden, Louisiana. April 28, 1971.
7. Mrs. Essie Sims, a student at Coleman College in 1916 and presently residing in Gibsland, Louisiana. May 4, 1971.
8. Mrs. Willie Pearrie, a student in 1906 who presently resides in Jonesboro, Louisiana. April 27, 1971.
9. Mrs. Alice Jackson, a student at Coleman College in 1927 who presently resides in Gibsland, Louisiana. May 4, 1971.
10. Mrs. Lizzie Green, a former student of Coleman College. May 7, 1971.
11. Mrs. Rosa Gipson, a student at Coleman College in 1934 who presently resides in Grambling, Louisiana. May 3, 1971.

12. Mrs. Nulon Williams, a student at Coleman College in 1929 who presently resides in Arcadia, Louisiana. April 25, 1971.
13. Mr. John Frazier, a student at Coleman College in 1919 and presently residing in Gibsland, Louisiana. April 20, 1971.
14. Mr. J. E. Williams, a teacher at Coleman College 1927-1934 who presently resides in Arcadia, Louisiana. April 25, 1971.
15. Mr. Ethelbert Smith, a student at Coleman College in 1934 and presently residing in Gibsland, Louisiana. May 4, 1971.
16. Mrs. Hattie B. Frazier, a former student of Coleman College who presently resides in Gibsland, Louisiana. April 20, 1971.
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18. _____ Unpublished paper on the history of Palestine Baptist Church. Presently in the possession of Mrs. Hattie B. Frazier.

more. Dr. Simmons (white) was Leland's first instructor.

Coleman College is easily one of the greatest Negro Baptist Schools not only in Louisiana, but in the South. It is beautifully located at Gibsland, La., on one of the most picturesque hills in the state. The ridge on which sits two three-story brick buildings; one two and a half story brick building; and two two-story frame buildings, is nearly a complete horse shoe made by the hand of nature's God. This institution is the life-work of Professor C. L. Coleman who founded it in 1888. Brother Coleman began practically with no house, but to-day the above mentioned stately buildings beautify the campus.

Valuation about 26 years ago practically nothing; today, its valuation is \$60,000, and it is the largest school in the state owned exclusively by Negro Baptists. Through President Coleman's influence and push it is supported more liberally by the white people of the North than any other school of its kind in the South.

It is supported by the following: The Home Mission Society of Boston; The Home Mission Society of New York; The United States Government Bureau of Agriculture; and by the Negro Baptists of Louisiana. It has been and is now doing untold good for the Baptist cause in Louisiana, having sent out many splendid young men and women. *Coleman College* emphasizes Christian training, not failing each session to lay aside books for a week or ten days, and engage in revival work, with wonderful success. Present Faculty: O. L. Coleman, A. M., President; J. D. Stewart, A. B., Associate President; A. L. Yates, B. A., O. W. Gray, C. R. Dickerson, Principal

William Hicks, 1869-1954
History of Louisiana Negro Baptists from 1804 to 1914.

Nashville, Tenn.: National Baptist Publishing Board, [1915].

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BOYS' DORMITORY, COLEMAN COLLEGE.

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BOYS' DORMITORY, COLEMAN COLLEGE.

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History of Louisiana Negro Baptists from 1804 to 1914.

Nashville, Tenn.: National Baptist Publishing Board, [1915].

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MAIN BUILDING, COLEMAN COLLEGE.

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MAIN BUILDING, COLEMAN COLLEGE.

Subjects:

- African American universities & colleges--Louisiana--Gibbsland.
- Coleman College (Gibbsland, La.)

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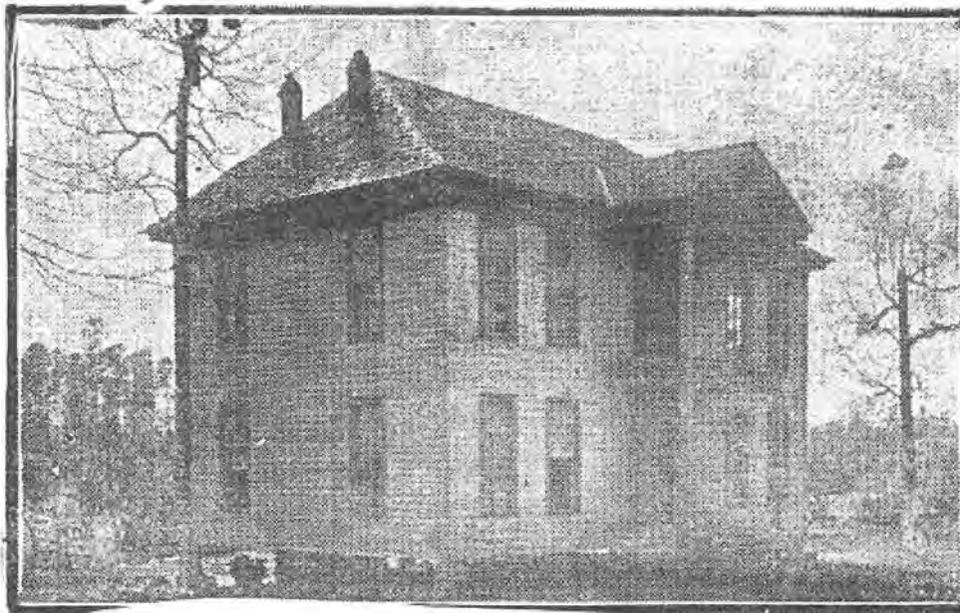
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Nashville, Tenn.: National Baptist Publishing Board, [1915].

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INTENDED THEOLOGICAL DEPARTMENT, COLEMAN COLLEGE.

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INTENDED THEOLOGICAL DEPARTMENT, COLEMAN COLLEGE.

Subjects:

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- Coleman College (Gibbsland, La.)

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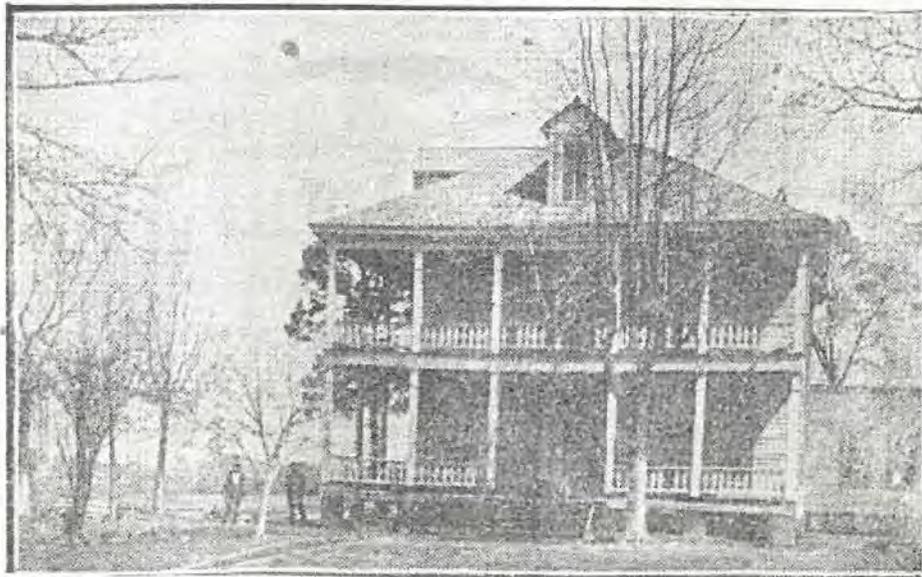
Nashville, Tenn.: National Baptist Publishing Board, [1915].

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ADMINISTRATION AND DINING DEPARTMENT, COLEMAN COLLEGE.

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**ADMINISTRATION AND DINING DEPARTMENT,
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Subjects:

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- Coleman College (Gibsland, La.)

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Cliver Louis Coleman, Founder and President of Coleman College 1857-1907.



The "Praying" Tree

COLEMAN COLLEGE

ROY A. MAYFIELD, PRESIDENT

The spot where Father Coleman prayed in the time of draught in 1896
and a gushing spring gushed forth eighty yards west of this tree.



we have more help or give up. The need led Mr. Coleman to set apart four months to pray three times a day under a certain hickory tree. He believes that the answer came in the form of help from the Woman's Baptist Home Mission Society of Boston, through the influence of Mrs. Mary C Reynolds, of Boston, and the American Baptist Home Mission Society of New York. He also believes that he caught the inspiration to pray from touching the life of Sister Moore.

What we have said about her could be said by every home, Sunday school, church, association and convention in Louisiana. When her teachers

Among Negroes 21

and pupils were excited and forced to leave her at Baton Rouge because of race disturbances, she donated to Coleman College all of her school equipment. She gave us the first money with which to build our toilets, and was the cause of having our first piano donated to us. Although she left the state, she never ceased to visit, counsel and pray with us until she died.

When Sister Moore first came to us she came with HOPE, and organized the Bible Band in the school which has been kept up for years. When it is remembered that Coleman College has a plant valued at \$100,000; has added to the church over 600 souls ; sent to the world over 1000 Christian teachers, graduates and preachers, it will be seen that the labor of Sister Moore, Sister Reynolds and others was not in vain.

*ERROR in photo outline in last week's Bienville Democrat.



Historical Marker Unveiled for Coleman College

Mayor John Marks, III, Great-grandson of Founder of Coleman College and first President, O.L. Coleman, was on hand for the unveiling of a Historical Marker at the site of the historical college on the now Gibsland-Coleman School Complex campus in Gibsland. Above at the unveiling are from left: Mrs. Elmira McCarty, who served as Mistress of Ceremonies at the dedication program Saturday, February 7, 2014; State Representative Patrick O. Jefferson; Mr. Marks; State Senator Rick Gallot; and Charlie Richardson, president of the Alumni Association. Due to cold weather, and indoor ceremony was held before the marker was unveiled outside. Hundreds of people showed up at the event hosted by the Gibsland-Coleman School Complex principal Christopher Jackson, and the Gibsland-Coleman Alumni Association, with comments from many area citizens and officials, as a copy of the marker was shown to the crowd, amid songs from the Gibsland-Coleman school choir. Then the permanent marker was unveiled outside on the school campus.