

Allen Parish Training School: Remembering a Legacy

Editor's Note: This is the first part of a series of articles on the history of Blacks in the Oakdale area. Part 1 was written by the late Mrs. Mae Belle Frost Lindsey.

Part 1

"To fully appreciate the heritage of Allen Parish Training School, (APT), which became Allen High School in the later years, it is necessary to include portions of the "First History of Allen Parish Louisiana "by Dorothy Seals Hudgins.

According to the documentation, Oakdale is the third oldest town in Allen Parish and was most densely populated in forestry.

Allen Parish was created from Old Imperial Calcasieu Parish on June 12, 1912. When originally created, it was composed of what is now Allen, Cameron, Calcasieu, Jefferson Davis and Beauregard Parishes.

Documents by Comeau revealed that the community was known in 1886 as Bay Post Office and Dunnsville. In 1893 the name Oakdale was adopted. The community was a trading center for the surrounding areas.

During the formative years, people coming into this area were from the Carolinas, Iowa, Kansas, Mississippi, Ohio and the Dakotas. While a few adventurous pioneers came into the section east of the river, perhaps 250 settled in the western region. Among the Indians in the western region afterward sprung a race of people of mixed ancestry known as Red Bones. (Origin Unknown)

None of the documents confirmed dates of Black pioneers; however, other information does reveal they came. They were servants, common laborers and caretakers in the mills and plantations. Orders were direct with limitations. A photograph is in the library of a Black group of workers. I was able to identify the late Mr. John L. Eaton but none were named. Evangeline's people also began to emerge in the area.

Research by Comeau stated that as early as 1896, Isaiah Watson conducted a private school in the Oakdale community. A similar institution headed by J. Houston Strother operated at a later date. In 1896, a public school was held in the Pine Grove Baptist Church.

By 1900, the Calcasieu School Board, recognizing the need for public education in the villages, authorized a four room school with M. V. Hargrove as principal. By 1907, a new twelve room school was headed by F.M. Hamilton. Eight years later, in 1915, twenty-five teachers were teaching about 750 students. The Oakdale Grammar School was constructed in 1914 and in 1923, the present Oakdale High School was dedicated. Eighty-five teachers were currently teaching in two community schools, white and black, with 2,330 enrollments.

We'll conclude on a character that some of us can identify, the late Dr. M. V. Hargrove. He was principal and teacher in the earlier years; later he became a medical doctor and served in the House of Representatives. Probably, his influence in education was felt by Blacks for many years.

Other records of Blacks being located here early from some place are the records from Black Churches and the dates of their establishment are as follows:

Shiloh Baptist Church 1907
Israelite Baptist Church 1908
St. Peter Baptist Church 1912
Greater Hayes Chapel 1913
Mr. Olive Baptist Church 1924
Rising Star Baptist Church 1925
Starlight Baptist Church Early 1900's
Red Brick Baptist Church 1932
First Church of God in Christ
Goodwill Baptist Church 1939
Free Will Baptist Church

By witnesses and records, education was certainly blooming.

Presidents during the formative years of Allen Parish Training School were:

Theodore Roosevelt (Republican) 1901-1909
William H. Taft (Republican) 1909-1913
Woodrow Wilson (Democrat) 1913-1921
William G. Harding (Republican) 1921-1923
Calvin Coolidge (Republican) 1923-1929
Herbert Hoover (Republican) 1929-1933

All of Louisiana's governors during this period were Democrats. The most popular of all was the election of Huey P. Long, 1928-1932. He built a powerful political machine and has remained a

strong force in Louisiana today.

Oakdale Mayorships were as follows:

J. H. Leggett 1913
Dr. T. L. Abington 1915
Remie Vidrine 1918
Ernest Eldred 1928
Dr. B. Iles 1934

The presidency, governor ship, political parties and mayorships affected the education of Blacks in many ways, even in Allen Parish.

A legacy is something that has been handed down from an ancestor or predecessor. This community has a rich black heritage of those who were patient, hard working and responsible while developing educational ideals.

Miss Josephine Taylor, a (now) deceased but retired teacher of our city recalled the following events prior to 1924-1932.

"At this time, Oakdale had Calcasieu Mill, Hardwood Mill, Old Forest Mill and Boman Hick Mill. West of the Black cemetery was an elementary school for grades 1-7. Students from Big Four, Hardwood and The Three came to this school. The parish would fund the school for six months. The parents and mills would fund the school for three months.

"When the mills shut down in 1925, everyone had to attend Allen Parish Training School. The teachers were Mrs. Sam, Mr. Castilo and Professor Cole. The Mill School had electric lights and served as a meeting place for all lodges and extra school meetings".

According to records, Hillyer Deutsch and Edwards was founded in 1917. In the mid 1930's they began manufacturing wood parts. Near the entrance of the mill was a primary school. Mrs. Gertrude Sleeper and Mrs. Lucy Sudds were teachers.

The Hardwood Mill continued assisting this school until the mid fifties. Mrs. Taylor continued, "Mr. T. J. Simpson was the founder of Allen Parish Training School. He was the Principal and the teacher. All building and construction was done on the Ballard Road. However, they moved the Little Red School to the campus for elementary grades. The site of the Little Red School was directly in front of Mrs. T. M. McCarter's home on Main Street, close to Greater Hayes Chapel. Before 1925-26 graduation was completed at 7 grade. Later three more years were added. My first graduation was with the class of 1925-26.

Students of the 1925-26 class were Caldonia Simpson, Eudith Bell, Bertha Steward, Rosa Lee Bell, Geneva Jones (Los Angeles), Doretha Lawson (Bunkie, La), and Josephine Taylor.

Faculty members were: Professor T. J. Simpson, (Math); Mrs. Dorethea Combre, (History); Mrs. R. O. G. McCarter, (English); Mrs. Winn, (Theory of Practice Teaching); Mrs. L. Ben, (Practice Teaching) and Mrs. Lucy Sudd, (Practice Teaching). Professor Simpson taught baseball and basketball; he played the games with students happily and firmly. We had two thirty minute recesses and the lunch period was one hour. Most of the students returned home for lunch and a few brought lunch to school."

"Mr. Simpson and the boys would go into the woods and gather wood for fuel and we had electricity then. To have money for school use, Mrs. Doretha Combre and class would make popcorn balls and cook other things to sell. The kitchen was not officially used for home economics at this time. Would you believe it? You had to take a state test for graduation; Dean Jones from Southern University and Mr. Lombard from the state department would come and give tests. Our instructor, Mrs. Winn would send the rostrum to the state.

In some way, Geneve Jones, Doretha Lawson and my name (Josephine Taylor) were not on the list for graduation and we were so disappointed; however, we met with state officials later and graduated. The highest students in that class were: Josephine Taylor, (Valedictorian) and Doretha Jones, (Salutatorian).

"As of today, we are still not sure of what happened, but Mrs. Winn did not return to Oakdale to teach.

There were very few discipline problems. The parents and teachers cooperated well in handling school affairs. The general attitude was respect of school, teachers and principal."

I asked Miss Taylor to sum up those years with a statement and she replied, "Looking back, we came by faith; It was quite a few steps to make. However, it seems not as if it was just one giant step made from yesterday into today."

Mrs. Willie Mae Jones carefully explained the details for the class of 1929. "I entered school under Professor Simpson in 1924, and continued under Mr. Horace White. School was taught in the Masonic Hall and Greater Hayes Chapel Church.

"Teacher's training at that time was done in the two room school where Greater Hayes Chapel is located today. Buildings were erected on Ballard Road and the two room school was moved from Elizabeth, La for an elementary school."

"Students of the class were: Willie Mae Jones, Gertrude Sleepers, Oscar Taylor, Charleston White (Detroit), W, H, Riggs, Rachel Tate, Alberta Legree, Dolphus Mays (Los Angeles), Ruby Williams and Floyd B. Tucker.

Faculty members were Mrs. Rist, Mrs Everlina Fisher-Davis, Miss Elnora White, Mrs. Lucy Sudds, Miss Myrtle Jones, Mr. Horace White and Mr. Horace Phony. Our curriculum was math, English, literature, geography, history, sewing and cooking. We had less sports, less basketball and baseball. We had two thirty minute recesses and a one hour lunch period. Most of us returned home for lunch. Mrs Everlina Fisher-Davis taught me home economics at 6 grade. When Mrs Everlina Fisher-Davis had to return to school, Mr. Horace Phony completed the school term for her.

Mr. Phony was the most qualified teacher at that time. He did not continue teaching because he developed a personal problem. I sure did hate that because he was a smart man. Of that class, the highest ranking students were: Ruby Williams (Valedictorian) and Willie Mae Jones (Salutatorian). As I recall those years, I remember how strict and energetic Professor Simpson was on the students. He really handled the boys well and everybody respected him; Mr. White was quiet but he handled everybody well."

"Allen Parish Training School - Allen High School, located on Ballard Road

was our favorite place for approximately forty-four (44) years. Professor T. J. Simpson was its founder and first principal.

His early successors were Mr. Horace White and Mr. Dillon. By 1931-32 Mr. T. E. Butler accepted the principalship and continued a successful career until May 27, 1967. Mr. Webster Duncan completed the term as principal and Mr. Robin H. Bradley served as the assistant principal. Mr. Webster Duncan served another whole school session before the system was dissolved."

This completes part one of the Legacy of Allen High School. Members that assisted with data and helped to verify information were: Josephine Taylor, Mrs. Willie Mae Jones, Mrs. Gertrude Sleeper and Churches of the community.

Collectively we thank these wonderful ladies for their contribution to this community; for collecting their minds unselfishly to a chain of questions, description, dates, characters and locations. They supplied knowledge and information of The Legacy and were an integral part of much of it. Their families deserves a salute each time we pass them. Part two of the Legacy will include the rest of us who associated at some point in time with the late Mr. T. E. Butler.

The late Mrs. Mae Belle Frost-Lindsey stated, It was a pleasurable and moving experience to write part 1; Justice may not have been done because there was a vast amount of information to condense in a short period of time. However, she added, "If any important event, etc has been omitted, kindly insert it in your copy and announce the finding to others." It was her wish that the Legacy will be preserved, enjoyed and in some way be significant in our lives as we pursue our separate ways."

"The mellowing influences of time and the general education of the masses are the only things that can eradicate the evil." Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback - The Only Black Governor of Louisiana for forty-three (43) days."

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Allen Parish Training School: Remembering a Legacy

A famous slogan of the past read: "Welcome to Oakdale~Where Oak is Queen and Pine is King." But we now welcome you to the home of a Federal Detention Center where the parish that will be constructing a prison soon. Regardless of the flexibility, we are hoping that your stay will be an enjoyable one.

A good story is measured, to a certain degree, by whether the reader can identify himself in the story. All of you are witnesses and characters in chapter two.

The late Mr. Thomas Ernest Butler followed the principalship of Mr. Dillon, who now resides in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He was appointed principle of Allen Parish Training School in 1933. In the early 30's, still unmarried, he boarded a while with the late Mr. and Mrs. Robert Sudds. Shortly afterwards, he wedded the late Mrs. Thelma Victoria Von Phul Butler and they became the parents of two daughters, Carolyn and Eileen.

Mr. Butler received his high school education in St. Helena and Tangipahoa parishes. He received his BS degree from Southern University in the class of 1932.

He continued his education, received a masters degree from Michigan State University and there he furthered his studies toward a doctorate degree.

In his youth, he confessed Christ and joined Cross Road AME Church, where he was very active in Sunday School and church. He was a member of Greater Hayes Chapel AME Church for a number of years. Later, he became a member of Newman United Methodist Church, Alexandria, Louisiana. He remained there until his final departure.

Mr. Butler developed and adopted a unique system of his own that would lead his people to greater heights under the Segregation Act and Separate but Equal law of the land. It appears that history, policies, philosophy, law, identities and education were the main factors he used to substantiate his system of leadership.

During the 30's, Oakdale was a saw mill town. Times were hard, money was scarce, blacks had limited freedom and Hoover was president of the United States.

Mr. Butler set the tone of his administration during a depression period of history. As time moved on, he slowly made adjustments with the times.

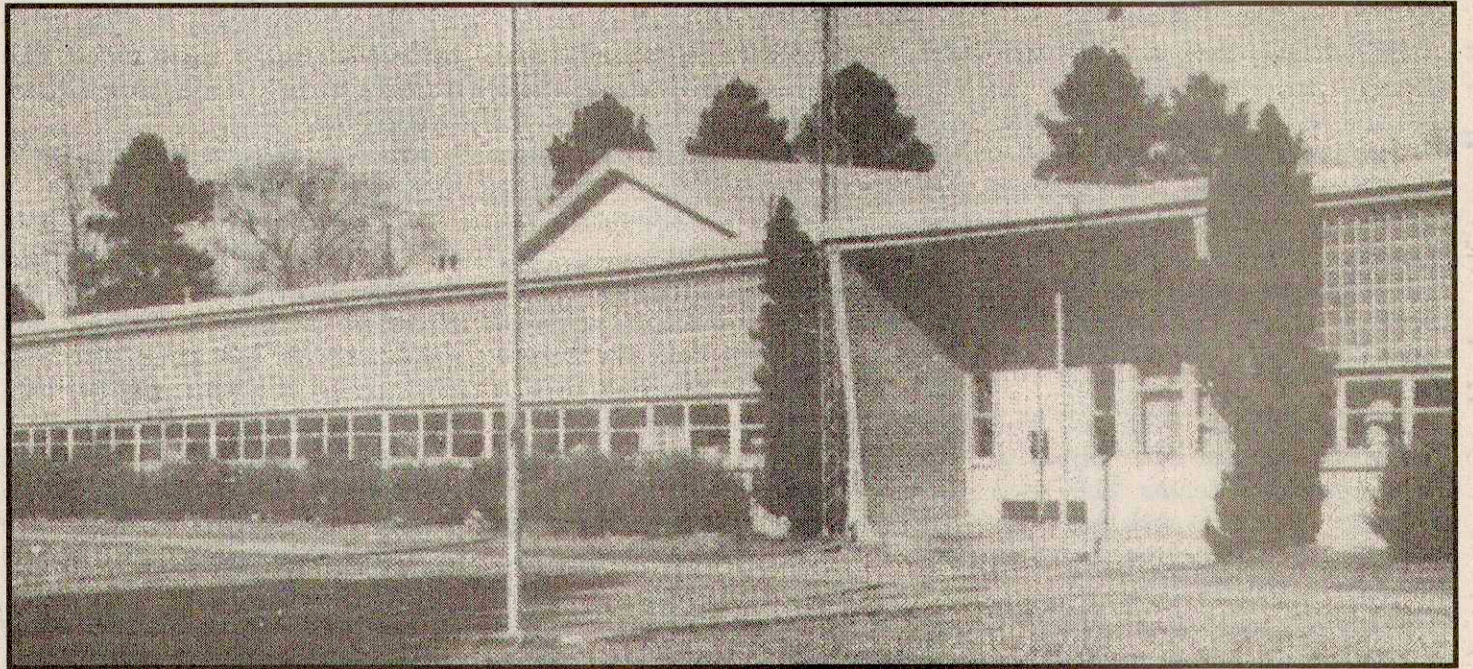
All can identify with the principal at some point in time, favorably or unfavorably. However, we must admit that he wanted to be a great leader. He set guidelines and deadlines for parents, teachers, students, lunchroom workers, janitors, office workers, secretaries and librarians. At certain times, he rebuked and disciplined them all.

It was reported to me that mature students were attending Allen High School during certain time periods. We understand that he even stood up to them despite the threats that were placed upon him. Unconsciously, he felt superior to all.

He was highly praised by state and local board members as a loyal, trusted and dedicated educator during the complete span of his principalship.

After World War II, the school curriculum began to broaden even more; he worked diligently with the staff in making significant changes; teachers began to further their education through: more workshops, parents/teacher study groups, vocational education, extensions programs and agriculture, unit teaching lessons plans by goals or aims and extra curricula activities. Also, certain policies became apparent such as sign in and out, duty assignments, signature requirements, and complete supervision of the total program.

During his administration, Allen High School had become an accredited institution. He maintained a permanent, dedicated faculty. The main sports remained basketball despite the many improvements being made nearby. Some classes of the late 40's early 50's and 60's may have produced NBA potentials



if the channeling and interest had been different. But the students played basketball anyway from a dirt court to a gymnasium. Many trophies and wards were the results of those struggling to be recognized in sports.

Through the years, Mr. Butler boasted of academic progress made by students and was very proud of their success. But he did not feel that the time was right to develop a complete physical education.

Mrs. Mazell Bradley (Mrs. Chester Campbell) became the first black business teacher in Allen Parish. She was able to assist the principal in improving Allen High's record system and overall management system of the school which paved the way for the school's accreditation.

Within the period of 35 years completed by Mr. Butler we must pause and consider his wife's role. We believe that the warmth, dignity and intelligence of the late Mrs. T.V. Butler helped to mold, soften mend and change some aspects of his administrative outlook. Mr. Butler was loved, adored and highly respected by all.

Violence and movements began sweeping the country in the 50's and 60's, the actions of a different generation, Korean Conflict, Vietnam War, the Martin Luther King, Jr. movement, the election of a young Catholic President, John R. Kennedy and the famous decision by the Supreme Court caused joy and chaos.

Mr. Butler often seemed highly depressed concerning the future outcomes. During his period of service he witnessed seven presidential election and Louisiana changed governors thirteen times. Mr. Butler began his administration under Mr. T. J. Griffin and ended under Mr. L. L. Smith. He respected the mayorship of Oakdale and other elected officials. However, he developed a special friendship with the late Mr. Parish Fuller, the late Mr. A. L. Stephens and the late Miss Alma May Rodgers, Supervisor.

In the late 1960's a T. E. Butler Day was declared. He appeared pleased and elated over the program and its participants. Mrs. Florence Benson-Johnson was the Chairman and Mrs. L. B. Compton was the Co-Chairman.

By this time he had begun to speak more openly about retiring after two more years of service. After the elder daughter was given in marriage, he began to prepare for a new home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Within the 8:00 A.M. hour, May 27, 1968, Mr. T. E. Butler was assisted from the school to receive medical attention and by 8:30 AM, Mr. Webster Duncan and Mr. Robin H. Bradley announced his final departure to the faculty.

Funeral service was held in the Allen High School Auditorium, 10:00 A.M., Wednesday, May 29, 1968. The late Dan Anderson of Anderson Funeral home of Alexandria was in charge.

The school session was completed by Mr. Webster A. Duncan serving as principal and Mr. Robin H. Bradley serving as assistant principal. The school board appointed Mr. Webster A. Duncan to the principalship for the following school year. Then the curtain was drawn on Allen High forevermore.

"The final test of a leader is that

he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on", (Walter Lippman).

Whether your favorite name was Professor T. E. Butler or other names, the man became a legend. He was liked, despised, loved, hated, appreciated, rejected, respected, courageous, criticized, and created humbly as any other normal human being. His memory will flourish through us, untimely.

In our conclusion, "Invictus" (by William Ernest Henley) seems to summarize what has been easily written of his losses, defeats and victories.

Invictus"
Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever God may be,
For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced or cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings of chance,
My head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and

tears,
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years,
Find, and shall find, me unafraid.
It matter not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.
(by William Ernest Henley)

I acknowledge with gratitude the following people who assisted me with information for Chapter 2 of Allen Parish Training School- Allen High School History:

Mrs. Josephine T. Brown
Mrs. Mazell B. Campbell
Mrs. Annie T. Craig
Mrs. Willie V. Jackson
Mrs. Mary Lee Lewis
Mrs. Mae Belle Frost-Lindsey,
Reporter
Mrs. Vandora Martin
Mrs. Eddie L. Rhodes and
Mrs. Johnny T. Shoemaker

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