

Francis Marion Boley (Jeanerette, La.) High School History (Matthew B. Polk Legacy)

When Matthew Polk graduated from the Howe Institute in New Iberia, La. which at that time had the only black high school between New Orleans, La. and Beaumont, Texas, he planned to pursue a career in medicine. However, it was the early 1930's and going to college and medical school would have been a financial burden for Polk and his family. Instead, Polk received a Bachelor's degree in education from Leland College in Baker, La. in 1936. He then went on to touch the lives of hundreds who passed under his tutelage during his thirty-three and a half years as principal of the Jeanerette Colored school while making his mark on the history of education in Iberia Parish.

Polk was born in 1912 near the old Dauterive Hospital in a section of New Iberia known as Brooklyn. He was the only child of the Rev. Branch and Marie Polk who operated a small grocery store.

"I was a little workhorse in my preschool days. I would help in the family grocery store and deliver groceries with my mother," Polk said.

The former principal attended grades 1-12 at the Howe Institute which was once located where the Iberia Parish Courthouse now stands. Before going off to college, he sold insurance for the Eagle Life Insurance Company and the People's Insurance Company.

After he received his Bachelor's degree, he was called in by School Superintendent L.G. Porter to replace a science teacher at the Iberia Parish Training School in New Iberia. The principal at the Parish Training School was A. B. Simon. He was there only eighteen months when he was appointed principal of the Jeanerette Colored Elementary School. Later that same year in 1938 Polk married Edith Bijou. The couple had been together for fifty-three years.

The Jeanerette Colored Elementary School evolved and became the Jeanerette Colored Junior High School and eventually became the Jeanerette Colored High School.

The school continued to expand, and it eventually outgrew the facilities on campus. "We started holding classes in all of the Benevolent Society Halls," he said. The original school had

been established in a little frame building on Canal Street, but in November 1949 we moved into a new school on Pellerin Street and continued to develop the school's facilities."

Under Polk's guidance, the school built a gymnasium, a stadium, and they established science, home economics, industrial arts and music sections. The school eventually formed football and basketball teams as well as a band and a Glee Club.

"We had a fine academic situation there, with all that was needed for academic and social development. Later we became an accredited high school," Polk said.

The fruits of his efforts have been plentiful, according to Polk, with many of his former students going on to professional careers. "The products have been very nice," he said. "We have a good number of teachers, ministers, and a physician. Many of the students are teaching in various colleges in other states. They keep in touch with me. One of his former students, Ned Doffoney, came to visit about two weeks ago to tell me he was promoted to Vice President of the Los Angeles City College."

Polk received his master's degree from Prairie View A& M University in Texas in 1956, while attending school during the summer months in order to complete the degree requirements. He retired in 1970 when some schools began to experience major problems with discipline and decorum. "We didn't have much of a discipline problem compared to now. The teachers and principals had control back then. I had a strap, but in thirty-three years I only used it on one boy."

The school later was renamed Francis M. Boley High School and was named after one of the principals that served before Polk. Plans are being made to hold a reunion of all former students who attended school under Mr. Polk from the graduating classes of 1937 to 1970. "They all loved him," Edith Polk said. "They still do."

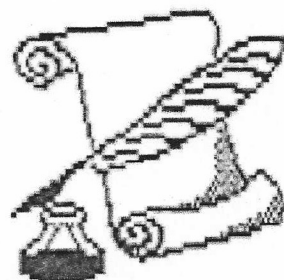
In 1981, some of his former students got together to celebrate "Matthew Polk Day". One of his former students, Iberia Parish School Board member Rita Holmes, served as mistress of ceremonies.

Until recently, Polk's hobby was tending to a twelve-acre farm in Loreauville, where he raised cattle and swine. He now rents the farmland as a source of income.

GREETINGS!

To the Classes of J.C.H.S. and F.M. Boley:

I hereby acknowledge my indebtedness to those of you who have taken time to willfully collect, assemble, and disseminate this information highlighting that which occurred in the past, the past being so dear.



Your achievements have been more than noteworthy and excelled all my dreams and expectations. You have executed your career choices with clarity and fortitude, and you have been zealously productive, pushing, always forward, blazing new trails and new frontiers.

If you are awaiting more "words of instructions" in light of your own renown achievements and accomplishments, the words would simply be: "Carry on."

Realizing that no man travels his way alone, but that which he puts into the lives of others, will, someday, come back into his own, I can say, without fear of contradiction, my children, your successes are the jewels you have given back into my life, whose glows make the work of the past more than worthwhile.

And so, I pass this legacy on to you: Vini vidi vici sublimity: non nobis sed allis- "Not for ourselves, but for others."

Again, accept my heartfelt gratitude and sincere appreciation for having had the opportunity to serve you as principal. I assure you, the pleasure was all mine.

*Appreciatively and lovingly yours,
Matthew B. Polk, Principal
Jeanerette Colored High School (J.C.H.S)
Francis Marion Boley High (F.M. Boley)*