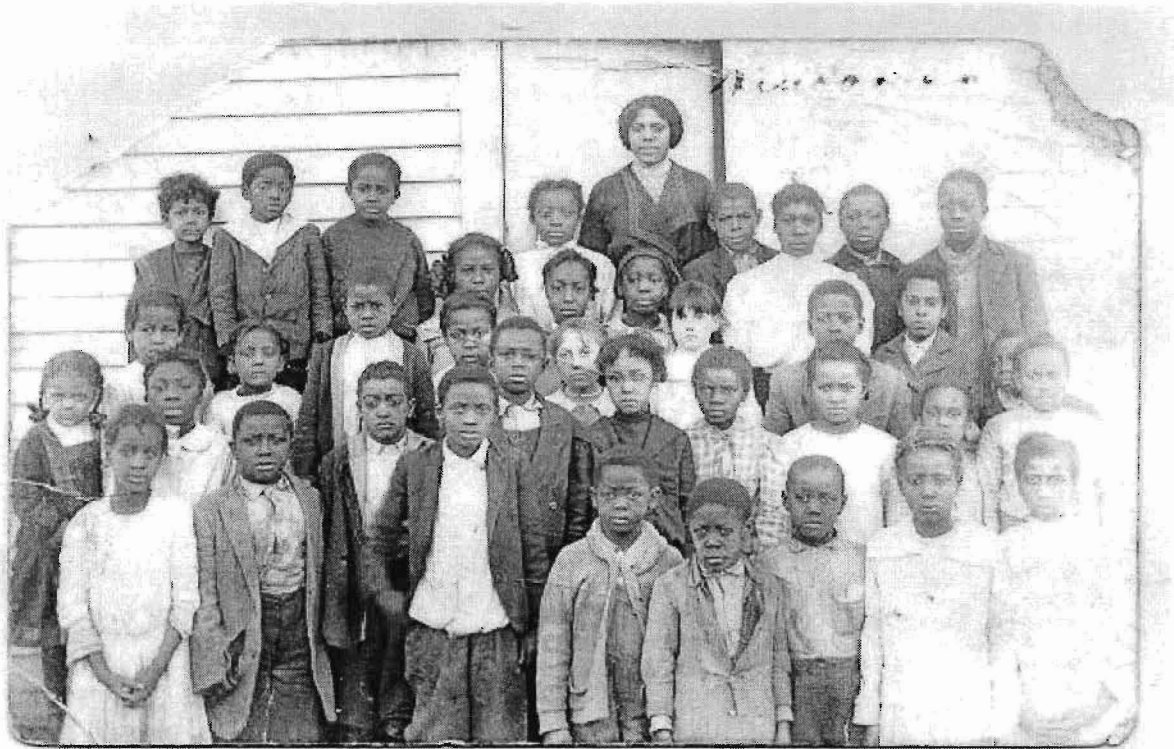


**AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOLS IN RURAL AND SMALL
TOWN MISSOURI: THE MISSOURI RIVER VALLEY**

Project No. 29-98-13128-476



Students at Lincoln School Keytesville, Chariton County, c. 1910

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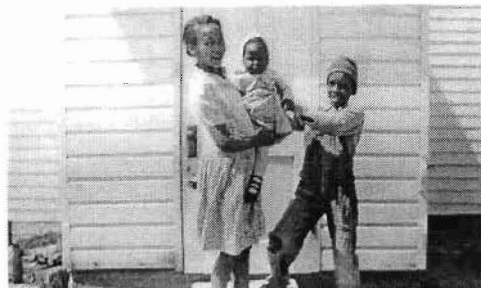
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Separate But Equal?--Rural and Small Town African American Schools in the Missouri River Valley

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When one thinks of African American schools in the Missouri River Valley, what usually come to mind are larger urban schools, local landmarks that materially and spiritually linger as part of the collective identity and experience of a relatively vast community. Schools like Hubbard-Sedalia, Garfield-Mexico, Lincoln-Jefferson City and Douglass-Columbia functioned as area high schools, and were such an integral part of the architectural and social landscape that after desegregation the buildings were immediately put to use as offices, apartments or community centers. These schools continued to operate until the mid 1950s and had many loyal alumni, some of whom recorded their memories and school experiences in writing, and many of whom keep their historical memory alive via reunions. But little attention has been paid to recording the histories, much less the architecture, of the many smaller, one and two-room schools that sprang up in smaller towns and rural areas wherever the school-age black population reached a sufficient number. These schools sometimes had names, most commonly Lincoln or Douglass, but more often were simply named after the town, the local white school, or the county district, with "colored" or "#2" tacked on to distinguish them from their white counterparts. In maps dating to the era of Reconstruction they are simply labeled "African Schools." These rural Jim Crow schools generally went up to the eighth grade and in some cases were only in session five months a year. They were established both in isolated rural black settlements and in black neighborhoods that developed on the fringes of dominant white communities. Some were used for just a few years, while others educated three and even four generations, depending on the longevity of the black community. For many African Americans, especially those who grew up before World War II, these marginalized institutions provided the only education they would ever receive.

In January, 1998, we began to document the social and material histories of all remaining rural and small-town African American schools in fifteen Missouri River counties.¹ Our goal is not only to document the architecture--the wide range of styles and types of buildings used as African American schools--but to record what is known of the individual histories of these schools, and in the process, to chronicle the reality that was Jim Crow. Our information is obtained through a close study of the buildings themselves, through public records and most importantly, through dozens of oral interviews with former students, teachers and administrators. Interviews have played a paramount role in our research into the histories of well over seventy rural and small-town schools to date: histories that are rapidly fading from memory and that highlight not only already-known truths about segregated education in Missouri, but also the surprisingly creative and persistent ways in which African Americans responded to the unjust confinement of such a system. The information obtained through our interviews is a powerful reminder that, removed from human experience, the buildings are no more than solitary remnants of segregation. As one scholar has noted:

a place has no feelings apart from human experience there. But a place is a location of experience. It evokes and organizes memories, images, feelings, sentiments, meanings, and the work of imagination. The feelings of a place are indeed the mental projections of individuals, but they come from collective experience and they do not happen anywhere else. They belong to the place.²

The education of former slaves and their descendants in Missouri was provided for in the Missouri Constitution of 1865. Article Nine mandated the establishment of free public schools for all residents of the state between the ages of five and twenty-one. In 1866 the state legislature sought to enforce this provision by requiring each township or city board of education in the state to establish and maintain schools for African Americans in jurisdictions where black school-age children numbered twenty or more.³ By 1870, as one historian pointed out, "Missouri was lauded as the former slave state with the largest proportion of schools for negro children."⁴ Although the growth and enhancement of black schools would

¹ This research is funded in part by William Woods University and by a federal grant from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Program and the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Portions of this work have been presented at the 1998 Missouri Conference on History, the 1998 Missouri Folklore Society Annual Meeting, and the 1998 Conference for the Preservation of the Midwest's Ethnic Heritage, in addition to regular meetings of numerous local historical and civic organizations.

² E. V. Walter, *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 21.

³ Duane Meyer, *The Heritage of Missouri--A History* (St. Louis, MO: State Publishing Co., 1973), 492.

⁴ Robert Brigham, *The Education of the Negro in Missouri*, Ph.D. Diss., University of Missouri, 1946, 125.

be slow after the conservative Democrats returned to power in the 1870s and re-wrote the state's constitution, progress would, nonetheless, remain steady. Of course, public education in Missouri would continue to be segregated by race throughout the first half of the twentieth century, gaining legal footing with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, and finally terminating in the years immediately following the famous *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954.

To be sure, education was coveted by newly freed African Americans. In defining the dreams and desires of freedmen in his classic *Black Reconstruction in America*, W.E.B. DuBois explained that “they wanted to know; they wanted to be able to interpret the cabalistic letters and figures which were the key to more...they were consumed with curiosity at the meaning of the world.”⁵ To freedmen, education was something that had been denied during the days of slavery; it was part of their definition of freedom. Needless to say, after the Civil War blacks everywhere were eager to establish schools.

At the time of Emancipation a substantial number of Missouri's estimated 115,000 former slaves were concentrated in the agriculturally rich counties of the Missouri River Valley, encompassing the heart of the little Dixie region. In several of these counties former slaves constituted between thirty-five and forty-five percent of the total population. Twenty-five years after slavery had ended, there were still large numbers of African Americans in the traditional seven counties of Little Dixie (approximately 45,000), a population that would increase steadily through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and would be only marginally affected by larger demographic changes involving African Americans, such as the Great Migration.⁶ We are thus focusing on counties with a high concentration of African American schools. For example, Callaway County at one time had twenty eight African American schools, Boone, eighteen; Howard, sixteen; Cooper, twenty six; Chariton, fourteen; Lafayette, twenty; Saline, eighteen. Although the number of schools decreased as rural black communities dissolved with the onslaught of the Depression and the economic opportunity of the New Deal, in 1933 these same counties still had the highest number of black schools outside of St. Louis and the Bootheel.⁷

⁵ W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, (New York: Antheneum, 1969), 234.

⁶ Milton Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri*. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 43.

⁷ Lloyd W. King, *Four Years of Progress with Missouri Public Schools for the Negro* (Jefferson City: MO: N.p., 1939), 35.

As black communities began to form, black schools and churches were erected throughout the Missouri River Valley. Both kinds of institutions stood as material symbols of a community's unity and reflected its desire to establish a separate identity apart not only from the dominant white communities, but other black communities as well. Churches and schools were an integral part of the black inhabitants' developing sense of place. For the earliest of these schools we have no written documentation, nor any oral record; they have largely faded from memory.⁸ Many of these schools, especially the early ones, have been razed or have fallen victim to the elements, but a surprising number have survived, largely due to adaptive re-use. As with black homes, these schools were simply not well constructed, and consequently were subject to rapid deterioration.⁹ However, former black schools throughout the Missouri River Valley have been converted into houses, apartments, storage sheds, garages, hay barns, grain bins, churches, ice houses, and bars. Since the majority of the schools consisted of no more than a single room, they were easily relocated. Adaptive and creative reuse has in fact spared most of the buildings that we have researched. Perhaps owing to the simple, utilitarian design of these buildings, people found logical reasons to save them.

Initially, the establishment of black schools met in many cases with local resistance, especially in central Missouri. In the late 1860s James Milton Turner, a black agent of the both the federal Freedmen's Bureau and the state department of education, noted countless incidents in central Missouri where local school boards failed to comply with provisions for black schools. State funds for the establishment of black schools were misappropriated or stolen, incompetent teachers were hired, and in some cases the number of black school-age children was purposely underestimated. As Turner encountered these individual situations head-on, he repeatedly had to turn to the state superintendent to threaten local boards into compliance. In Arrow Rock Turner found that state funds for the establishment of a black school had somehow vanished. In places like Roanoke, Turner discovered a hostile white community openly resisting the establishment of a school for African Americans.¹⁰ As late as 1911 in Lafayette County near the small town of Corder, the home of a black family was bombed by a mob of fifty local whites expressing their

⁸ These numbers are based on remaining written and oral sources. It is likely that even more African American schools were established.

⁹ Constance M. Greiff, ed., *Lost America: From the Mississippi to the Pacific* (Princeton: The Pyne Press, 1972), 9.

¹⁰ Gary Kremer, *James Milton Turner and The Promise of America* (Columbia, MO.: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 28ff.

outrage at plans to establish an African American school.¹¹ In general, as far as the local white communities of mid-Missouri were concerned, the establishment and maintenance of black schools were of low priority.

A significant number of the buildings where African Americans attended school, especially in the late nineteenth century, were not originally designed as schools at all. Many of the first schools established for blacks during Reconstruction were private residences.¹² The Goode home outside of Moselle in southeastern Franklin County is believed to have been established as a school immediately following Emancipation; the Goode family lived in the house at the time and class was held in their dining room.¹³ The first school for African Americans in Tipton (Moniteau County) was held in the home of Cal Shackleford, the A.M.E. preacher. In Nelson (Saline County), Thornton Taylor's home was the school for a number of years following Emancipation. Boonville students met in a house that was called Elias Buckner School until their first school was erected in 1868.¹⁴

Many other buildings originally designed as homes were purchased and used as schools throughout the Jim Crow era. Extant examples reflect a wide range of styles. For example, Robinson School (Fig. 1), a double-pen house built in the 1890s north of Prairie Home (Cooper County), was purchased by the local school board and used as a school from about 1910 through 1925. Similarly, Englewood School in Boone County's Three Creeks community, south of Columbia was originally the two-room Smith home, but was converted into the local school and used through the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁵ When Truitt School south of Stephens Store (Callaway County) burned in 1922, the local school board purchased and converted a small, one room ceramic block structure originally designed as a coal workers cottage. Some of the earliest schools were single-pen homes of log construction, although few examples exist.¹⁶

¹¹ *Kansas City Post*, October 18, 1911, p. 2.

¹² The oral record and local written histories have all underscored the fact that most of the earliest schools were, in fact established in private homes.

¹³ Clyde Gennery, interview by author, tape recording, Union, MO., February 14, 1999; telephone interview February 6, 1999.

¹⁴ Shipley, James. Interview by author. Tipton, MO., May 11, 1998. Also see: *History of Saline County, Missouri*. (Marshall, MO.: Saline County Historical Society), 1983. 127, and Robert L. Dyer, *Boonville: An Illustrated History*. (Boonville, MO.: Pekitanoui Press., 1987), 133. The house in Boonville was called Elias Buckner School.

¹⁵ Byron Smith, interview by author, tape recording, Columbia, MO., January 22, 1995.

¹⁶ Sparse written evidence has supported information obtained from informants who told us of earlier schools that were of log construction. In Callaway County at least two log schools were still in use as late as 1911. Callaway County, Clerk's Office. Rural School Records, Callaway County Courthouse, Fulton, MO. The first Hawkins School near New Bloomfield in Callaway County was a single pen log cabin located in a patch of woods.

Churches also functioned as African American schools. Nine of the schools that we have examined thus far are churches. Crow's Fork A.M.E. (Fig. 2) in Callaway County was Pugh "Colored" from 1885 to 1925. In Liberty, the basement of St. Luke's A.M.E. Church was one of the first black schools in Clay County. The "African School" in St. Charles, built in 1865, was actually purchased by the district, converted and became Lincoln School in 1871¹⁷. Brown's Chapel (Freewill Baptist) was the first African American School in Arrow Rock (Saline County), and was used from 1870 to 1892, when the first school building in the community was finally erected.¹⁸

It was not uncommon for churches to serve as schools in the late Jim Crow era. Constructed in 1880, Oakley A.M.E. in Tebbetts (Callaway County) was Hord School for several years during the Depression. Lexington's black students attended school in Zion A.M.E. Church for three years (1939-1942) after a fire consumed Douglass School in the winter of 1937.¹⁹ From just after the turn of the century through the 1920s, African Americans in Washington attended the second of three Crispus Attucks schools in that city, which was a converted Presbyterian church dating from the late 1860s. Individuals who attended school in churches recalled the difficulty of sitting and working in a pew. Richland Church, south of Glasgow (Howard County), functioned as both church and school for a significant black farming community through the 1940s, and was reputed to have been outfitted with both pews and desks, openly reflecting its dual function.²⁰

Occasionally schools were built on church property. In Nelson, the school board determined that a black school should be built in the shadow of St. John's Church, despite the fact that this particular lot was prone to flooding. Similarly, Douglass School north of Foristell (St. Charles County) was erected in the 1920s on the edge of a one-acre property occupied since 1871 by Smith A.M.E. Church and cemetery.²¹

Even if a separate school was built, there invariably existed a tight bond between church and school, since churches were an integral part of African American communities. Whether Baptist or A.M.E., the church was more than just a place of worship; it served as the heart and soul of the black population.

¹⁷ See: "One Hundred Years of Negro Education in St. Charles, Missouri" in Franklin High School Reunion Association (program) (N.p.: n.p., 1997). Also Melvin Washington, interview by author, tape recording, St. Charles, MO., March 23, 1999.

¹⁸ Gary Kremer, "African American Education in Arrow Rock, Missouri," unpublished manuscript.

¹⁹ Jack Holmes, interview by author, tape recording, Lexington, MO., September 12, 1998. After the original Douglass school burned in 1937, the white school board there was reluctant to immediately construct a new school; "new" Douglass was constructed in 1943-1944 only after a controversial bond issue was voted on and passed in 1942.

²⁰ Maxine Bynum, interview by author, tape recording, Glasgow, MO. April 13, 1999.

²¹ Missouri. St. Charles County. Recorder's Office. Deed Books. St. Charles County Courthouse, St. Charles, Missouri.

School functions were commonly held at the local church; Christmas programs, graduation ceremonies as well as basket dinners and picnics and a host of other celebrations often involved both church and school.²²

Some businesses even functioned as temporary schools. In Armstrong (Howard County), a bar called The Big Apple was the black school from at least as early as 1895 through 1902, when the first Douglass School was built. Students used tables and bar stools as desks by day, and in the evening The Big Apple was the center of nightlife on the black side of the tracks in Armstrong.²³

When schools were built they were very simple, utilitarian structures, rectilinear in form, one- or sometimes two-room, commonly gable end. Although often similar to their white counterparts in economy of design, the rural schools especially, were always inferior in terms of construction and materials. Structures such as Herbert King School in Portland (Callaway County) (Fig. 3), Lincoln School in Wellsville (Montgomery County), Otterville "Colored" (Cooper County), and Moselle "Colored" (Franklin County), typify the rural African American school. These and many similar schools had little or no insulation, and were usually outfitted with a simple wood stove. What former students remember most is how intolerably cold the buildings were in the winter. Marvin Hughes, who attended Phyllis Wheatley on the outskirts of Dalton in the 1930s, remembered that on cold days class was conducted around the stove. Eugene Sims, who attended Otterville "Colored," told how the wood stove was where students huddled together on cold winter days. Sometimes it was more practical to close school. Margaret Ewing, the third generation of her family to attend Gregory-Yucatan, noted that "during years with very cold winters--we probably went to school about five or six months total."²⁴

The larger the town and the black population, the larger, more substantial, and more elaborate the building. The majority of small-town schools in our study are practically identical to the rural schools, although often constructed on a slightly larger scale. They usually were comprised of a single classroom, or at times contained a second smaller class room or entrance room and exhibited sparse stylistic ornament that was often nonexistent in their rural counterparts. On occasion they were built on a "T" plan, as is exhibited in Phyllis Wheatley in Dalton (Chariton County), Lincoln School in Blackburn (Saline

²² Countless interviews attest to the close ties between school and church.

²³ Dorothy Parker, interview by author, tape recording, Armstrong, MO., January 24, 1997; March 7, 1997.

²⁴ Margaret Ewing, interview by author, Yucatan, MO., March 6, 1999.

County) (Fig. 4), or Gibson School located north of Wright City (Warren County). Some "T" plan schools were comprised of a single room with a temporary divider while others were designed with two permanent classrooms, in addition to a distinctive projecting entrance hall. Black schools were sometimes built on a cube plan, as reflected in Lincoln School in Excelsior Springs (Clay County) (Fig. 5). The largest, and least common design of black schools is four-over-four, but it is exemplified in buildings such as Dalton Vocational School's historic Bartlett Building (Fig. 6). Generally speaking, the larger schools are more high-style in design, and reflect all major trends from the Victorian of Tipton's Harrison School (Fig. 7), to the Craftsman of Douglass-Higginsville (Fig. 8), and Dunbar Centralia, to Deco of Lexington's Douglass School (Fig. 9) and Boonville's Sumner, to Neo-Colonial of Washington's Crispus Attucks (Fig. 10), to the more "modern" 1950s brick, concrete and glass austerity of Dunbar-Bunceton (Fig. 11).

Most of the small-town schools and virtually all rural schools, even the later ones, were without indoor plumbing (as was also true of white rural schools of the day). Gibson School near Wright City, operated from around 1915 until 1962, without plumbing. Most schools had wells located nearby, but these dried up by early summer, and in such cases part of the daily routine included designated students walking up to a mile or more to carry a bucket of water from a local cistern, spring or creek. In Moselle, Franklin County, the school's daily water supply came from the creek at the bottom of the hill, the same creek that flowed first through white Moselle.²⁵ At Liberty School, Gooch's Mill (Cooper County) the older boys were assigned the morning ritual of procuring their daily supply of drinking water from a spring located one-half mile away.²⁶ In the 1930s at rural Foristell's Douglass school, the well water became contaminated by the adjoining cemetery and for years thereafter the school obtained its drinking water from a cistern located on a nearby farm.²⁷

School buildings were sometimes white cast-offs. In several instances when whites obtained a new school, the blacks moved into the former white building, which was invariably better than the building that they were currently using. In 1940, near Gooch's Mill, Liberty Colored School was in such a state of disrepair that African American students held class in the recently vacated Liberty (white) School, one mile up the road.²⁸ Similarly, in Mayview (Lafayette County), Lincoln school was in such poor condition that

²⁵ Gennerly interview.

²⁶ Lelia May, interview by author, tape recording, Boonville, MO., June 2, 1998.

²⁷ Donald Luckett, interview by author, tape recording, Wentzville, MO., June 15, 1998

²⁸ May interview.

when the white community built a new mission-style building on the west side of town in 1928, Lincoln on the east side was razed and the former white, one-room school house was moved from across town on skids, by mule team, and placed on the former site.²⁹ It was in continuous use until 1957. Schools were also built with used materials. In 1892, when the whites built a new school in Arrow Rock, the lumber from the old white school was carefully removed and hauled across town to build the "new" black school, which was used until it burned in 1932.³⁰

There was at least one recorded incident where a white school burned and the blacks were removed from their relatively new school and forced to move to an inferior building in the country, several miles outside of town while their school was converted into a white elementary, replete with brand new books and materials. This took place in Blackburn in western Saline County in 1948. There is still bitterness over the injustice in the dwindling black community today. Nellie Guthrie a former teacher at Lincoln-Blackburn angrily recalled that "when the whites wanted the building they just kicked us out---it was a sad day for the Negroes in Blackburn--and one we've never forgotten."³¹

Although there were a few exceptions, local white school boards were largely unsympathetic to the material needs of black students. In all Jim Crow schools, books and other educational materials were hand-me-downs from the white schools. Typically the books came directly from the local school white, whether it was across town or down the road; black students were well-aware of this fact.³² The books that African American students received frequently had pages, pictures, or whole chapters missing. Eighty-year-old Herbert Ellett in Excelsior Springs noted: "Its like this--one page may have 'little boy blue come blow your horn,' you'd turn the page and the rest of the story wouldn't be there--we never got the whole story."³³ Students simply made due by looking at the book of the student beside them. Clyde Generley who attended Lincoln School in Union explained: "if we had a page missing then we'd look over on someone else and they'd do the same--we got the lesson, but we had to work at it."³⁴ Eighty-seven-year-

²⁹ India Marie Turner, interview by author, Mayview, MO., September 12, 1998. Also Lutie Johnson, telephone interview by author, Mayview, MO., October 11, 1998.

³⁰ Kremer, "African American Education in Arrow Rock, Missouri."

³¹ Nellie Guthrie, interview by author, tape recording, Blackburn, MO., October 3, 1998.

³² Countless interviews attest to the fact that books were always white discards and practically unusable.

³³ Herbert Ellett, interview by author, tape recording, Excelsior Springs, MO., February 18, 1999.

³⁴ Gennerly interview.

old Delmore Clayborne of southern Montgomery County summed up bluntly what we have documented in interview after interview: "they didn't fuckin' give us nothing that wasn't worn out by white kids."³⁵

In some schools teachers were not even provided with blackboards; black-painted plaster sufficed for students who attended Nelson Colored and Lincoln-Gilliam (Saline County), Bush School (Montgomery County), Dunbar School in Centralia (Boone County) and a number of other schools built before 1920.³⁶ Large nails served as coat hooks, and there was no play equipment except for what the students brought from home. Jack Holmes, who attended old Douglass School in Lexington in the early 1930s, recalled that the library only had a few old books and was little more than a storage room, and that the school was never adequately supplied: "nothing ever materialized--it was always the same old song--no money in the budget. What it was a snow job--a sly way of telling us that it wasn't going to get done--that we wasn't going to get it. We were suppose to be taught useful skills that would help us get a job--the only typewriter in the building was the one used by the principal."³⁷ The superintendent's records from Callaway County in 1909 give us an excellent example of the conditions under which blacks attended rural schools. At Viers "colored" he notes: "No apparatus of any kind. Floor dirty. The house is log, not plastered just chinked and no ceiling. Desks good. Stove good. Outhouse fair. Plenty of trees. No well. Blackboard good. Order good. Need some desks and a broom. Value of house \$50.00."³⁸ Morning View School, west of Guthrie was even worse: "No maps, globe, charts, or frame. No library. No teacher's chair. No coat hooks. No well. No outhouses. No wood house. It is in the woods in a field of brush and trees"³⁹ (it was in fact over a mile from any road). In the cases of several rural schools, it was noted that they were never even provided with an adequate supply of wood. When their wood supply ran out one cold winter during the Depression, Yucatan's Gregory School (Callaway County) temporarily closed.⁴⁰

The locations of rural African American schools were another problem; schools were not always convenient to the community that they served. They were often located where the majority of black families were concentrated. For blacks who lived outside of the central community, or in cases where they

³⁵ Delmore Clayborne, interview by author, tape recording, McKittrick, MO., July 23, 1998.

³⁶ Many early rural schools and small-town schools built in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries used black-painted plaster as chalkboards. Schools like Nelson were eventually outfitted with chalkboards.

³⁷ Holmes interview.

³⁸ Callaway County Missouri, Recorder's Office. Callaway County Superintendent of Schools Notes, 1909-1911, Callaway County Courthouse, Fulton, Missouri.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ewing interview.

Montgomery County had so many Callaway students attending that the teacher's salary was paid by Callaway County.⁴⁷

High school was available to African American students, but for many it was simply not feasible, since it frequently meant traveling long distances, or moving, or working out arrangements with relatives in Kansas City, St. Louis, Sedalia, or Jefferson City.⁴⁸ Beginning in the late 1930s, some small-town schools, like Harrison-Tipton and Lincoln-Montgomery City began to offer certain years of high school on an "as needed" basis so that more students would continue their education.⁴⁹ The 1940s witnessed the beginning of state-funded bus transportation for rural and small-town students to regional high schools that were up to seventy-five miles away from home. For example, students from Chariton, northern Saline, northern Howard, Carroll and Randolph counties were bused to Dalton Vocational School, seven miles southwest of Keytesville. From eastern and northern Saline County, western Moniteau, and Morgan Counties students were transported to Lincoln-Hubbard in Sedalia. From as far away as northern Callaway and Franklin Counties they attended Lincoln-Jefferson City. It is clear that many students had to quit school after the eighth grade. Perhaps most quit simply because they had to work to contribute support for their families.

With few exceptions, rural black schools had a female teacher who taught all eight grades. If the black population was large enough to merit a two-room school, two teachers were employed; one taught grades one through four, while a second taught five through eight. Some teachers stayed at a particular school for many years and became local institutions. Others changed positions relatively frequently. Lilly Blackstone taught at Oak Hill near Pleasant Green (Cooper County) for the better part of three decades. Similarly, Gladys Brown taught students at Lincoln School in Blackwater from the early years of the Depression through the 1940s. Nannie Walker taught at her one-room school in Lexington for so long that generations of blacks referred to the building only as "Miss Walker's School"⁵⁰ By contrast, Lelia May and her sister, Eula Nelson, in their distinguished careers as educators taught at numerous schools throughout Cooper and Howard Counties. May taught at Tuscumbia (Belaire), Dunbar-Bunceton, Liberty-Wooldridge,

⁴⁷ Callaway County, Missouri, Clerk's Office, Rural school records, Callaway County Courthouse, Fulton, Missouri.

⁴⁸ Countless interviews attest to the fact that families sometimes made arrangements with relatives living in larger cities so that a student could attend high school.

⁴⁹ Shipley interview.

⁵⁰ Holmes interview. Also: Bernice Taylor, interview by author, tape recording, Lexington, MO., July 3, 1999.

were geographically diffuse, this meant a long walk or drive. Delmore Clayborne recalled: "they made it hard for blacks to get an education...if they didn't have enough kids in an area they didn't get no school."⁴¹ Clayborne and several other students from Warren County were transported seven miles to a one-room school in Little Africa, a black community outside of McKittrick, in the back of a pickup truck. Dorothy Parker of Armstrong recalls riding a mule to her small school on the western edge of Roanoke (Howard County), from her home located some three miles west of town.⁴² Others remember having to either walk long distances or live with friends or relatives. Sylvester Hill was raised on an isolated farm in northern Moniteau County and had no choice but to attend Liberty School in Gooch's Mill (Cooper County), some eight miles west, which necessitated living with his grandmother, and later his uncle. Indicative of the still-lingering African American view of education as opportunity, Hill recalled: "You'd stay with just about anybody you could to go to school."⁴³ Blacks' persistent desire for education led to creative schemes for procuring transportation or living arrangements: in return for Hill's room and board his family lent his relatives a good mule and a horse and wagon.⁴⁴

If a drop in enrollment forced the closing of schools, the remaining students were required to attend the closest black school, which could be located many miles away. When their school was closed in 1923 and students from Cave's Community in Callaway County began to attend Hawkins school outside of New Bloomfield, four rugged miles away, they were transported in a large covered wagon across fields owned by not-so-accommodating whites.⁴⁵ Similarly, in Franklin County, when Moselle School closed, students were transported in a converted Model-T Ford to Lincoln in Union, twelve miles away. The state was required to pay transportation costs, but the reimbursement generally amounted to very little.⁴⁶ Bus transportation was not available until the 1940s. Given the situation, county boundaries were often meaningless. For example, students in southern Audrain and eastern Boone Counties are known to have attended Callaway schools when they were closer. Truitt, on the eastern edge of Callaway County, always had a high enrollment of Boone County students. Similarly, Bush School east of Reads ville, in southern

⁴¹ Clayborne interview.

⁴² Dorothy Parker, interview by author, Armstrong, MO., January 24, 1997.

⁴³ Hill, Sylvester. Interview by author. Boonville, MO. October 1, 1999.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Bernice Whittler, interview by author, tape recording, New Bloomfield, MO., September 17, 1998. If the fields of neighboring whites were muddy, residents of Cave's Community had to take a much longer route on county roads.

⁴⁶ Gennerly interview.

Liberty-Speed, Fayette, and, after integration, Bunceton Public Schools, where she retired. Her sister Eula taught at Salem-Prairie Home, Liberty-Wooldridge, Highland #2 (Browntown) and Dunbar-Bunceton, where she also served as principal.

Most teachers active from 1920 through desegregation were trained at Lincoln University. Earlier teachers had at least some high school coursework. Many were even high school graduates.⁵¹ Up until the mid-1940s, qualification was less a matter of formal education than of passing a state exam. Black women teachers were paid less than either whites, regardless of gender, or black males. For example, in 1936, in Speed, the white teacher at Palestine School had a high school education from Bunceton, six terms teaching experience, and was paid \$62.50 per month. The black teacher at Liberty Jewell, the black school located several hundred feet east, had 101 credits from Lincoln University, and fifteen terms classroom experience; her salary was set at \$45.00 per month.⁵² Continuing education workshops in the 1940s and 1950s in Cooper County reflected similar racial injustice. Teachers were obligated to attend periodic county workshops held in the Laura Speed Eliot Auditorium. Black teachers were required to sit upstairs and were openly discouraged from participating in discussion. May recalled: "if they passed out any material, it never seemed to make it around to us."⁵³

With desegregation, most black teachers simply lost their jobs.⁵⁴ The majority were not hired by local white schools; black teachers were, by and large, the big losers in desegregation. Often local school districts regarded black teachers as less qualified and felt that their hiring would only provoke white hostility.⁵⁵ There were exceptions: Betty Brown, who taught in Gibson, north of Wright City from 1950-1962 was the first African American hired at Wentzville High School, from where she retired in 1990. Melvin Washington, long-time principal of Franklin School in St. Charles, was also hired by the local white district, not as an administrator, but as an Algebra teacher.⁵⁶ An overwhelming number of the rural and small-town teachers were forced into other occupations.

⁵¹ Missouri, Cooper County, Rural School Records. Public school records from other counties also attest to this fact.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ May interview.

⁵⁴ Betty Brown, interview by author, tape recording, Wright City, MO., September 19, 1998.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Washington interview. Washington would eventually move back into administration, but desegregation dealt his career a severe setback.

Our research demonstrates that African American students in Missouri learned to cope with a plethora of handicaps. It shows, too, that despite being deprived and marginalized, they did make the best of their education. The histories we are recording aptly reflect the African American emphasis on education as the ticket to upward mobility that never waned in rural Missouri. Almost all informants who attended rural schools from the 1910s through the 1950s could read and write, though the vast majority of those currently over sixty did not make it past the eighth grade.⁵⁷ Moreover, these schools gave students a moral base, a sense of dignity and self respect, and an optimistic outlook on life, on community and on race in the face of a society that had long viewed segregation and its apparent inequality as part of a natural order. Seventy-eight-year-old Faye Holt, who attended several rural Callaway County schools, summed up what countless others have told us: "that was the way it was--we didn't know any different--we didn't get too far, but we made good with what little we got."⁵⁸

Individually, each history is a snapshot of black rural and small-town Missouri, an inside look at an African American community that has either vanished or stands to do so as later generations drift away from their rural and small-town roots. Collectively the histories and material remnants of African American schools in the Missouri River Valley say much about segregation; they provide insight into the harsh reality of Jim Crow education in general and provide a better understanding and appreciation of the African American experience outside of major cities. Although our study is still far from complete, we hope that our work will provide an important and much needed chapter in Missouri's rich, yet insufficiently studied African American legacy.

⁵⁷ This assumption is based on interviews with fifty-three African Americans over the age of sixty. Most of those interviewed felt that these schools had given them the tools for a comfortable and relatively successful life.

⁵⁸ Faye Holt, interview by author, tape recording, Guthrie, MO., June 30, 1996.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Robinson School, vcn. Prairie Home, MO., Cooper Co. Double-pen, saddlebag design. c.1890



Fig. 2. Crow's Fork Church. Vcn. Fulton, MO., Callaway Co. Gable-end Church. c.1890.

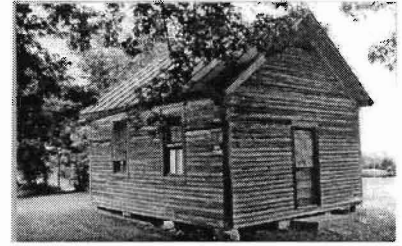


Fig. 3. Herbert King School, Portland, MO., Callaway Co. Simple gable-end school. c.1900



Fig. 4. Lincoln School, Blackburn, MO., Saline Co. Typical "T"-plan design. c.1934.



Fig. 5. Lincoln School, Excelsior Springs, MO., Clay Co. Cube design school. 1887.

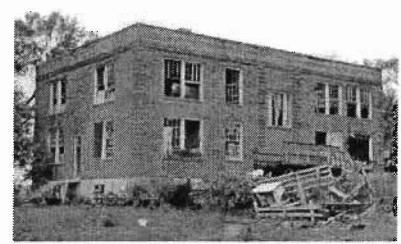


Fig. 6. Bartlett Classroom Building, Dalton Vocational School, Dalton, MO., Chariton Co.. Four-over-four variation.

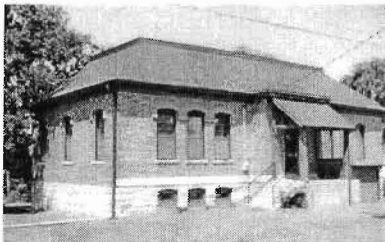


Fig. 7. Harrison School, Tipton, MO. Moniteau Co. Victorian design. 1890.



Fig. 8. Douglass School, Higginsville, MO. Lafayette Co. Craftsman design. 1927



Fig. 9. Douglass School, Lexington, MO., Lafayette, Co. Utilitarian Deco. 1942.

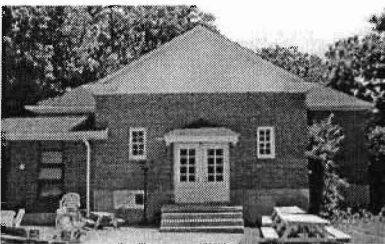


Fig. 10. Crispus Attucks School, Washington, MO., Franklin Co. Neo-Colonial. 1942



Fig. 11. Dunbar School, Bunceton, MO., Cooper Co. Contemporary design. 1951.

AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOLS IN RURAL AND SMALL TOWN MISSOURI: THE MISSOURI RIVER VALLEY

ORAL RESOURCES

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MASTER LIST

1. Dunbar--Centralia
2. Dunbar--Vcn., Auxvasse
3. Grant (Whetstone)--Vcn., Williamsberg
4. Gregory--Yucatan--Vcn., Williamsberg
5. Truitt--Vcn., Stephens Store
6. Hawkins School--Vcn., New Bloomfield
7. Herbert King--Vcn., Portland
8. Oakley AME Church--Vcn., Tebbetts
9. Pugh--Crow's Fork Church--Vcn., Fulton
10. Gravel--Mt Vernon Church--Vcn., Holt's Summit
11. Oak Chapel Church--Vcn., Guthrie
12. Phillis Wheatley--Dalton
13. Dalton Vocational School--Vcn., Dalton
14. Lincoln--Salisbury
15. Lincoln--Keytesville
16. Garrison --Liberty
17. Lincoln--Excelsior Springs
18. Robinson--Vcn., Prairie Home
19. Lincoln--Blackwater
20. Sumner--Boonville
21. Dunbar--Bunceton
22. Liberty--Vcn., Wooldridge
23. Otterville Colored--Otterville
24. Attucks (old)--Washington
25. Attucks-- Washington
26. Dunbar--St. Clair
27. Lincoln--Union
28. Booker T. Washington--New Haven
29. Moselle Colored--Vcn., Moselle
30. Douglass--Armstrong
31. Douglass--Higginsville
32. Douglass--Lexington
33. Douglass--Mayview
34. Zion AME--Lexington.
35. Dover Colored--Dover
36. Harrison--Tipton
37. Lincoln--Montgomery City
38. New Florence Colored--New Florence
39. Bush School--Vcn., Readsville
40. Lincoln--Wellsville
41. Lincoln--Richmond
42. Arrowrock Colored--Vcn., Arrowrock
43. Nelson Colored--Nelson
44. Lincoln--Gilliam
45. Lincoln--Miami
46. Lincoln--Mt. Leonard
47. Lincoln--Blackburn
48. Lincoln--Wentzville
49. Douglass--Vcn., Forestell
50. Gibson--Vcn., Wright City