

Storer College Records A&M 1131

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1908-1943



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Biographical / Historical

Storer College of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, emerged from the aftermath of the Civil War with the purpose of educating former slaves who were now facing the world with few skills and no education. It began in 1865 as a school in the Lockwood House, a private residence, with the support of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society of New England under Reverend Nathan Cook Brackett; in 1867 it officially became Storer Normal School, with the mission of training teachers; and in 1938 Storer became a College. The College closed in 1955 due to declining enrollment, financial problems, and the advent of desegregation.

Although there were dedicated teachers in the beginning, by 1867 there were still only 16 instructors to educate 2,500 students. Reverend Brackett realized the only way to reach all of the students was to train African American teachers, thus necessitating the expansion of the school into a teacher college.

The philanthropist John Storer from Maine came forward and offered a \$10,000 grant to the Freewill Baptists to create a teacher college under three conditions: first, the school must eventually become a degree-granting college; second, the school had to be open to all applicants, regardless of race or gender; and finally, the most difficult of the prerequisites, the Freewill Baptist Church had to match his \$10,000 donation within a year. After a year-long effort the money was raised, and Storer Normal School opened its doors; and by March 1868 it received its state charter.

In the beginning local residents were resistant to a "colored school" and tried to shut it down through slander, vandalism, and local politics. One teacher wrote, "it is unusual for me to go to the Post Office without being hooted at, and twice I have been stoned on the streets at noonday." The attitudes of local residents eventually changed, however, so that later in his life Reverend Brackett became a respected citizen of Harpers Ferry.

Though Storer remained primarily a teacher college, in time it began adding courses in higher education to its curriculum so that students could graduate with a normal degree for teaching, or an academic degree for going on to college. In 1938, under the leadership of school president Henry T. McDonald, Storer became a college. Its enrollment peaked at around 400, and then dipped lower during World War II. The College survived until 1955 when declining enrollment, financial stress, and court-ordered desegregation combined to close it.

In addition to its progressive role in educating African Americans, the College became associated with other advocates of civil rights, such as Frederick Douglass, who visited Storer Normal School in 1881 to deliver a speech on John Brown, and the Niagra Movement led by William Du Bois, who held a conference at Storer in 1906. The NAACP was later to adopt many of the goals of the Niagra Movement.

[This historical note was sourced from the West Virginia Encyclopedia and Wikipedia.]

Scope and Contents

Documents regarding Storer College at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. The collection includes a prospectus regarding the nature, history, and future of the college (1908); an invitation to the unveiling and dedication of a memorial to Heyward Shepherd (1931); a program for the Twentieth Founders Day Exercises (1943);

and a transcript of an address given by Storer College alumnus and professor William A. Saunders for the Twentieth Founders Day Exercises (1943). Please see "Historical Note" for further information regarding Storer College.

Related A&M Collections

1131, 1168, 1322, 1471, 2621

Keywords

Harpers Ferry (W. Va.)

African Americans -- Education (Higher)

African Americans - Schools for Freedmen.

Education

Schools. SEE ALSO Academies

Universities and colleges

Shenandoah River Valley (Va. and W. Va.)

Missionaries

Storer College

McDonald, Henry Temple, 1872-1951

Saunders, William A.

Shepherd, Heyward, -1859