

# \*TREE TALK\*

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## Editor's Letter

Our Vice President, George W. Martin, is also the President of the Booker T. Washington Alumni Association, Alto, Texas. He recently led the effort to publish an alumni book honoring students, faculty, staff and others who want to preserve the history of segregated Black Schools of Southern Cherokee County.

As part of his research, George found a Thesis in Education submitted in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for a Degree of Bachelor of Science in the division of Arts and Sciences of the PRAIRIE VIEW STATE NORMAL AND INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE, Prairie View, Texas, (May 1939). Charles O'Neal Bradley wrote "A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas".

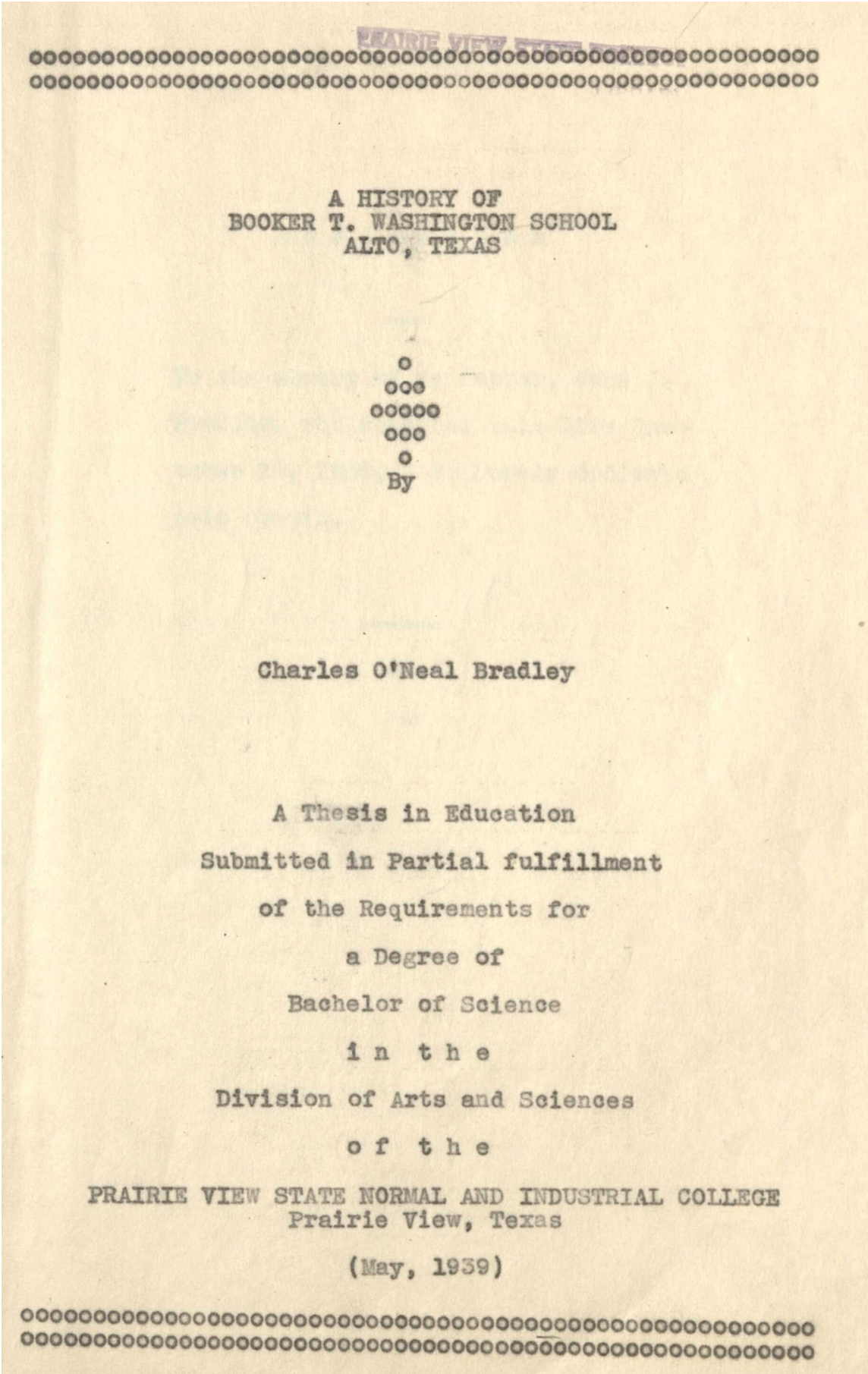
The Thesis is the lead article in this issue of TREE TALK.

George also wrote the introduction to the Booker T. Washington Alumni Association book. This introduction also tells the history of the "grit and determination to establish the communities of New Hope (Alto), St. Thomas Chapel, Bradford Mountain, Linwood, Sweet Union, Weeping Mary (The Flat) and Morrill ". This section begins on page 132.

I hope you enjoy this issue of TREE TALK.

**Gordon Bennett, Editor**

**A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas**  
**By Charles O'Neal Bradley**





# A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

## Dedication

To the memory of my father, John J. Bradley, who departed this life December 19, 1935, I do humbly dedicate this thesis.



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

### A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t

The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to all those people of Alto, Texas, who so willingly gave the information necessary in making this study. To Dr G L Harrison, Head of the Department of Education, of Prairie View College, I am indebted for his timely advice and guidance and for his criticism from time to time. These services have been most helpful.

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# A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

### I n t r o d u c t i o n

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#### A. Purpose of Study

The history of the Booker T. Washington High School, Alto, Texas is written because the author feels that there is a need for records of the development of such institutions. Especially is this true of institutions which have rendered valuable service to a community over a long period of time.

The purpose of this study is to show how the school has progressed from its beginning in early past slavery days, and to trace its development to the present time.

Included in the study is a list of all the persons who have served as teachers in the school since its beginning up to and including those teaching in the school at the present.

These teachers are listed in chronological order. Note is also made as to the preparation of teachers at the time of their employment in the school.

No attempt is made to distort facts in order that this thesis might reflect undue credit to the school, nor to the people of the community which it serves, but the facts are stated as found by the author.

The study also includes all extra curricular activities that have been or that are now included in the school program, as well as an account of the fame



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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of clubs that served as a part of the curriculum.

### Method of Procedure

In attempting to obtain the information necessary to make this study, the author sent questionnaires to persons whom he felt were capable of giving the desired and needed information.

Aside from the material collected in this manner, the author personally interviewed people who were students of the first free school in 1876, and other people who had been students in the school at various times since then. Some of the teachers who had taught in the school were also interviewed. Among the teachers interviewed was one who had taught in the school as far back as the term 1887-1888.

### Source of Data

These data were supplemented by information obtained from the office of the county superintendent in Rusk, Texas, and from minutes kept by the parents teachers association and other organizations which worked at various times in connection with the school. A small amount of information was obtained from a History of Cherokee County.<sup>1</sup> All this information was supplemented by the writer's personal knowledge of the school, gained through attendance in the school and association with members of the faculty and student body for a period of more than twenty years.

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<sup>1</sup>History of Cherokee County by Hattie L Roach, Southwest Press.



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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### A HISTORY OF BOOKER T. WASHINGTON SCHOOL ALTO, TEXAS

The Booker T. Washington High School, Alto, Texas, had its real beginning in a small pay school organized by Jim Studdlefield in 1874, a former Negro slave who had learned to read, write, and to do problems in arithmetic through his association with his master's children. In this private school tuition charges of fifty-cents per month was payable in cash or in commodities which the students possessed that would aid the school master in his effort to maintain his livelihood in an economic situation to which he nor other members of the community had not been wholly able to adjust themselves.

From a personal interview with the few survivors who attended this "First School", the writer found that Stubblefield could do little more than read, write his own name, and solve the simplest problems in arithmetic. In reality, the teaching amounted to little more than training the children to do the things he had learned to do. The books used was the bible and for arithmetic only the simplest problems that the teacher could make up; as there were no text books available.

Through the interest created by this private school and through the desire of the people of the com-



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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munity to attain the things of life which would aid them throughout life, enough enthusiasm was worked up in the community in the spring and summer of 1876 to organize a school district. With the aid of the county judge, who, at that time served as county school superintendent, plans were made for a Free Public School.

Through the leadership of F. E. Selman, Jack Jordan, Brown Mitchell and Alfred Gipson the community people came together and selected a one room log house from logs that had been used as a kitchen for the slaves of one Sam Harrison. This building was located one and one-eighth mile north of the town of Alto and on property now serving as a cemetery.

The free school was officially opened in October of 1876 with Jim Stubblefield as teacher and with an enrollment of approximately thirty students. The above named men of the community served as trustees with the exception of Alfred Gibson.

The requirements for teaching at this time consist of appearing before the county judge and convincing him of one's ability to read and write one's name.

The school was community supported and was open to both boys and girls between the ages of eight and sixteen years. For those students seventeen years of age a fee of one dollar per month was charged.



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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The school year was made up of two terms. One of the months beginning in October after crops were gathered and the other two months during July and August. Making in all a term of about six months.

The curriculum was composed of the three R's, Webster blue back speller, McGuffies's reader, and any kind of arithmetic that the student was able to acquire.

The school building had no equipment which would aid the student in his search for knowledge. All writing and arithmetic was done on slates owned by the individual himself.

Stubblefield was replaced by Dan Tidwell who had had the privilege of attending high school in Marshall, Texas, and was able to do a higher grade of work than Stubblefield. The salary of the teacher was twenty-five dollars per month and with the fee collected from the over-age students ranged around thirty-dollars.

The people who are living today and who were students at that time speak of these first teachers in glowing terms and seem to think that they were very efficient for that time.

By 1881, due to an increase in enrollment from thirty to sixty-five, a larger building and an additional teacher were needed. At this time a large community house was constructed which served as both a church and a school. From records made available by the county



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

superintendent it was learned that the school opened in 1881 with two teachers, with the aid and support of the state. By this time, the available readers were graded and training through the fifth and sixth grades was offered. And for the first time a course in "Read and Kellogs English Grammar" was offered to the fifth and sixth grades.

The first extra curricular activities had their appearance in the school term of 1881-1882 in the form of school programs made up of songs and recitals by students and teachers, and in the playing of house ball which was participated in by the larger boys of the school and supplimented by young men of the community.

Through the offering of work in higher grades in the school and a gradual increase in the population of the community, the enrollment gradually increased. By 1890, it had reached eighty-five or nenety and in 1900 the enrollment mounted to 120 or 125 students and the school term was lengthened to seven months. The teachers by the time were much better prepared than those of twenty years before. A third grade certificate entitled the holder to work only in the county from which it was issued. Books were more plentiful and much easier accessible since they were cheaper than formerly.

Probably the chief reason for the advancement in preparation of teachers was the fact that in 1891 the method of securing a teachers certificate had

## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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changed from that of appearing before the judge to one of passing an examination prepared by the state board of education and administered and graded by the county board of education. These examinations varied according to the type of certificate desired.

Since the inauguration of the extra curricular activities in the early eighties, there had been no advancement in the program aside from the literary programs and the administrators of the school had nothing to do with the other program of activities.

The school continued to operate under practically the same set until 1903 when through the State Legislature the school was combined with the white school of Alto in so far as management was concerned. The colored trustees were replaced by the same trustees that served the white school. At the time of this change it was thought that it would be for the good of the school, but from a check-up upon the school since this time it is found that much of the money set aside by the state for the school is being and has for a long time been used for the white schools. ✓

In 1907, a new school was erected on the site of the present school. This was a two room frame building with a seating capacity of about one-hundred and fifty students.

As a result of interviews with many of the



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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people who were students and some who were teachers from as far back as 1888. The writer was led to the conclusion that the use of an assistant was left entirely in the hands of the principal. The school board hired the assistant if the principal wanted one, but where he thought he could do the work alone, no one was hired.

Until 1917 very little stress was placed upon the preparation of the teachers and the type or kind of text books used. With the opening of school in September, 1917, came free text books and perhaps the best prepared teachers that the school had ever had. Through the use of uniform text books teachers were able to do a much better type of work. In this same year writing and art drawing were introduced into the school program.

## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

### Extra Curricular Activities

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The first extra curricular activities sponsored by the school was tennis on a small scale for the upper grade students in 1917. Though no special effort was put forth to vigorously push the game as such, it offered some diversions for the students. Baseball became a part of the school's program of activities in the spring of this same school session.

The next addition was made in 1923 when volleyball was introduced partly as an intramural sport. At this period an effort was made by the teachers to give the child the fundamentals of the good sportsmanship and an appreciation of fair play.

Basketball was included in 1905 for both boys and girls, and an active program of games was played with other schools of the county. This is the only game that has been continuously offered since its inauguration into the school program.

These activities were made possible through the Dramatic Club of the school which sponsored plays for the benefit of the school. And in the school term of 1924-25, the school was able to operate for nine months only because the finances were supplemented through the money collected from the plays presented



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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by the dramatic club.

Track was added to the program of activities in 1926 and was followed with much interest until 1930 when the school was financially unable to further its track program.

The activity program today includes basketball, tennis, volley ball, baseball, track, a dramatic club and an older boys club.

During this first year, the P. T. A. procured for the school a globe, maps, dictionaries and books to be used in the library. No record of the books was kept but the globe is still in use, even though it is not in keeping with recent world changes.

In the year 1924-25, the P. T. A. was organized in order that its efforts might extend over a period of nine months. This time, of course, was supplemented by funds derived from other sources by the dramatic club.

In 1925-26 the P. T. A. was instrumental in purchasing books for the school. These books are similar to the ones being used at present in the offices of the Education Building here at Prairie View.

The P. T. A. also purchased a set of the World Book Company Encyclopedia for the library.



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### The Parent Teachers Association

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The Parent Teachers Association had its beginning in the school term of 1923-24, and worked for material things which would aid in furthering the programs of the school and for a closer coordination of the school's program with the social life of the community.

During this first year, the P. T. A. secured for the school a globe, maps, dictionaries and books to be used in the library. No record of the books was kept but the other equipment is still in use, even though it is not in keeping with recent world changes.

In the term 1924-25, the funds of the P. T. A. were used in order that the school term might extend over a period of nine months. This fund, of course, was supplimented by funds derived from plays presented by the dramatic club.

In 1925-26 the P. T. A. was instrumental in purchasing shades for the school. These shades are similar to the ones being used at present in the offices of the Education Building here at Prairie View.

The P. T. A. also purchased a set of the World Book Company Encyclopedia for the library.



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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These books have given much aid in enriching the subject matter of the various classes.

During the next two years the P. T. A. aided in the general furtherance of the school program. It provided equipment for the shop and for the activity program sponsored by the school. For the first time the school was able to send a judging team to Prairie View. This trip was made possible through the P. T. A.

The P. T. A. purchased a piano for the school which was paid for during the years 1925 through 1928.

From 1928 to 1937 there was no actively functioning P. T. A. The cause for the period of inactivity is conjectural. In the year 1937, with the new principal in charge, the P. T. A. was reviewed and begun working for the good of the school. Through their efforts last year the school was repainted and during the present time (1938-39), the P. T. A. has aided in adding tennis and volley ball to the activity program of the school.

In the spring of 1924, under the leadership of Principal W. H. Brandon a move started for the purpose of erecting a new school building. Immediately the entire community with the exception of a few dissenters was behind the movement. When the school board was approached, they at once cried "We have no funds."



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The community was determined and at once put on a drive among themselves for pledges to the building fund. By November 1, 1924, the drive had netted six hundred and fifty dollars. The building committee continually brought as much pressure as possible upon the school. Through one liberal member of the board it was finally induced to appropriate the balance of the money necessary to match funds made available through the Rosenwald fund, provided the building committee would give the money already raised for the building purpose. This was done in a short time and almost immediately the building program was under way. This building was completed in July of 1925, and the school session opened in a new home in September, 1925. This building included four large class rooms, a large auditorium, principal's office and an open library.

The school for 1925-26 though having more space and added facilities offered the same program as had been offered before.

In 1926, the curricular was expanded to include home economics, agriculture, broom and mattress and a general course in farm shop. This expansion program and the interest which it created, plus the benefit derived from it by the students was a great aid to the

## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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community. Besides being able to hold the interest of the students, through the expanded curricular much improvement was seen in the community.

The members of the agricultural groups planted small crops and followed the new methods of farming which was introduced. Many of the homes took on better appearances, because of repairs made possible through things the boys of the community learned to do at school. Among the things included in the shop were step-cutting and construction and fence building. Through this crop progress, some of the students produced enough products to enable them to attend college for one year. Many homes took advantage of the mattress making program and more than one-hundred mattresses were renovated. The broom and mattress working program lasted only two years, but its effect upon the community was lasting.

Results of the farm club will be of value as long as the community depends upon farming as a means of support.

In 1927, the school applied for state recognition as an accredited high school, but due to the length of the term and teaching staff, this recognition was denied and limited, today the school is still non-accredited. Each change of teachers brought about a change in the offerings of the school. In 1928, the



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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change instead of advancing the program cut it far short of what it had been, thus destroying the chance it did have of becoming an accredited school. No other effort has been made to make it a fully accredited school.

There was a lull in interest in the school from 1929 through 1937 during which period, due to the seeming indifference of the school board, the school was allowed to merely drift along being almost nothing more than just a place to keep the children so they would be no trouble to the parent at home. As might be noted from the table of teachers, and their highest training, one can in reality see that these teachers were not prepared. In one instance, a high school graduate with a certificate taught for two years. At the same time there were several persons living in the community who had attended college for two years and were holders of certificates, but were not hired for reason not stated by the board. The principal who served for three years at this time studied one summer in college as a freshman student.

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## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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### The School of Today

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In 1937 the school opened with new teachers and perhaps teachers with better preparation than any heretofore. The principal has done two summers work on his Masters Degree at Chicago University. One assistant has her B.S. Degree and the others have completed more than two years in college.

New interest was awakened in the schools' program and with the proper support the future looms brightly with an opportunity for real advancement of the school. The program is designed to meet the needs of the people of the community. The program is built around problems peculiar to this particular locality. The school is showing signs of growth and with proper equipment and larger teaching staff it will be a simple matter to build an enterprizing school. The community seems highly pleased with the type of work being done by this faculty.

Arithmetic

English

Geography

Writing

Spelling

Reading

Health

Drawing

Arithmetic

English

Reading

Spelling

Geography

Health



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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### Curriculum

The curriculum at present is made up of the following:

#### First and Second Grades:

Number work  
Reading  
Spelling  
Writing  
Drawing  
Oral Health  
Construction work

#### Third Grade

Arithmetic	Spelling
English	Reading
Geography	Health
Writing	Drawing

#### Fourth Grade

Arithmetic	Spelling
English	Reading
Geography	Health
Writing	Drawing

#### Fifth Grade:

Arithmetic	Spelling
English	Geography
Reading	Health

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Writing

Drawing

## Sixth Grade

Arithmetic

Geography

English

Spelling

History

Health

## Reading

## Seventh Grade

Arithmetic

Geography

English

Spelling

History U.S.

Civics

## Health

## Eighth Grade

English

Health

Algebra

Agriculture (boys)

Home Economics (Girls)

## Ninth Grade

Prose and Poetry

Agriculture

Algebra

Home Economics

Health

## Tenth Grade

and

## Eleventh Grade

Business Arithmetic

Agriculture

English

Home Economics

Biology



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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### Extra Curricular Activities

The school is an enlarged library and an extended curriculum.

The faculty feels that the teachers will not be overburdened with classes. The

Baseball

Tennis

basketball

volley ball

debating

Dramatics

Softball

Glee Club.

The library

If the school is to fulfill its function in

training the child it is necessary that the program

be expanded in the direction of the future training

the child will develop in his knowledge of and an appreciation

of the fundamental principles of science, mathematics, and history

the fundamental principles of science, mathematics, and history

the use of letters and the ethical character

the use of letters and the ethical character

## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

### The School's Needs

The most pressing need of the school at present is an enlarged faculty and an expanded curriculum. The faculty needs enlarging to the extent that the teachers will not be over loaded with classes. The curriculum should be expanded to the point where it will include natural science courses, agriculture and home economics.

The library should be enlarged and more materials in the form of fiction, non fiction, and periodicals publications are most needed. The expansion of the library would enable the teachers to do a better job of teaching through the use of supplementary materials from the library.

If the school is to fulfill its function in training the child it is necessary that the program be expanded in order that the child may receive training which will develop in his knowledge of and an appreciation for health, worthy home membership, command of the fundamental processes, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure time and ethical character. Thus, fulfilling the aims of education.



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

The school is in need of a department of music and a director of music. Those students at present, who wish to study music, must either go out of town for instructions or attend a private white music school located in the city. A music director would add much toward helping the school to adequately serve the needs of the community.

### Table of Teachers

Years Taught	Name:	Highest Training
1876-77	John Stubblefield	Unknown
1877-78	John Stubblefield	Unknown
1878-79	John Stubblefield	Unknown
1879-80	Dan Tidwell	Marshall High*
1880-81	Dan Tidwell	Marshall High
1881-82	Dan Tidwell	Marshall High
1882-83	John Floyd	Unknown
1883-84	John Stephens	Nashville High*
1884-85	John Stephens	Nashville High
1885-86	John Stephens	Nashville High

\*Graduate.

## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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### Table of Teachers

Years Taught	Name:	Highest Training
1886-87	Russell Sanders	Summer Normal
1887-88	Martha Simley	7th Grade
1889-90	J.K.P. Luker	Bishop*
"	Mrs. Luker	Bishop
1890-91	Mrs. Luker	Bishop
1891-92	J.K.P. Luker	Bishop
1892-93	Mrs Luker	Bishop
"	J.K.P Luker	Bishop
1893-94	Mrs Luker	Bishop
1894-95	John Mitchell	Prairie View*
"	John Bradley	Prairie View**
1895-96	John Mitchell	Prairie View
"	John Bradley	Prairie View
1896-97	John Mitchell	Prairie View
"	John Bradley	Prairie View
1897-98	John Bradley	Prairie View
"	Anna Henderson	Prairie View***

\* Graduate  
 \*\* two years  
 \*\*\*1 year



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

Page 23 of theses is missing.

Table of Teachers

Years Taught	Name	Highest Training
1914-15	Mrs Holland	Prairie View
"	P. S. Holland	Bishop
1915-16	Mrs Holland	Prairie View
1916-17	J. C. Bradford	Prairie View*
"	Mercedes Smith	Wiley*
1917-18	J. C. Bradford	Prairie View
"	Mercedes Smith	Wiley
1918-19	J. C. Bradford	Prairie View
"	Mercedes Smith	Wiley
1919-20	J. C. Bradford	Prairie View
1920-21	Fannie McFaddin	Mary Allen*
"	Mable Sanders	" *
1921-22	E. C. Powell	Prairie View*
"	C. E. Jordan	Butler College*
1922-23	E. C. Powell	Prairie View
"	Johnnie Kyle	Paul Quinn*
"	Eleanor Johnson	Prairie View 3yrs.
1923-24	W. H. Brandon	Samuel Houston*
	Mrs Brandon	Prairie View*
	Mrs. Anderson	Prairie View

\*graduate.

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## Table of Teachers

Years Taught	Name	Highest Training
1925-26	A. C. Tharton	Wiley*
	J. J. Bradley	Prairie View
	Mrs Anderson	Prairie View
1926-27	J. H. Johns	Prairie View*
	Mrs Johns	Prairie View*
	Mrs Anderson	Texas College
	Elnora Hooper	Prairie View
1928-29	N. C. Brown	Bishop
	Miss A. Hackney	Prairie View
	Miss Lattimore	Texas College
1929-30	N. C. Brown	Bishop
	P. Tinsley	Butler
	L. Lattimore	Texas College
	Johnson	Prairie View
1930-31	N. C. Brown	Bishop
	P. Tinsley	Butler
	B. Williams	Butler
	D. O. Jermany	Bishop
1931-32	James Earle	Texas
	P. Tinsley	Butler

\* graduate.



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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### Table of Teachers

Years Taught	Name	Highest Training
1931-32	B. Tillman	Butler
1932-33	Will Hoyt	Prairie View
	Mrs L Hoyt	Texas College
	Vivian Richards	Timpson High
1933-34	Will Hoyt	Prairie View
	Mrs Hoyt	Texas College
	Vivian Richards	Timpson High
1934-35	Will Hoyt	Prairie View(Fresh)
	Miss Hoyt	Texas "
	C. Spiller	Prairie View (soph)
1935-36	Hooper	Prairie View(Senior)
	F. Bradley	Bishop*
	C. Spiller	Prairie View
	O. Matthews	Mary Allen
1937-38	W. Ford	Texas*
	B. Ford	Prairie View*
	C. Spiller	Prairie View**
	O. Matthews	Mary Allen**
1938-39	W. Ford	Texas College*
	B. Ford	Prairie View*
	O. Matthews	Mary Allen**
	R. Martin	Prairie View**

\* graduate.

\*\* two years.

# A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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## Table of Enrollment

At beginning, by decades since 1880 and at present.

1876.....	30
1880.....	65
1890.....	86
1900.....	106
1910.....	185
1920.....	185
1930.....	340
1936.....	180

During some of the years between 1880 and 1900 the school was little more than a place of the few children during the day. In 1880 it was still more a simple building to meet the needs of the people of the territory. \_\_\_\_\_

In 1876, with a new building in 1880, the school was still more a place of the few children during the day. In 1880 it was still more a simple building to meet the needs of the people of the territory.

The reputation of the school was raised from 1880 to 1900. In 1880 it was still more a place of the few children during the day. In 1880 it was still more a simple building to meet the needs of the people of the territory.



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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### S u m m a r y

The Booker T. Washington High School, Alto, Texas, was established in 1876. It is one of the two oldest schools in Cherokee County, and among the oldest in East Texas. The school has had a gradual growth in students and many changes have been made in the offerings of the school. The earliest curriculum included only the three R's. The curriculum grew gradually until 1923, when due to some indifference upon the part of the school board and the teachers employed, there was a lull of interest in the school and a great decrease in the offerings of the school.

During some of the years between 1908 and 1937 the school was little more than a place of keeping the children during the day. No attempt was made to offer a program designed to meet the needs of the people of the community.

In 1937, with a new faculty in charge, interest in the school was again awakened and at present the program is being expanded and based upon the needs of the people of the community.

The preparation of the teachers has varied from time to time. but as late as 1932, teachers were hired who had never attended college.



## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas

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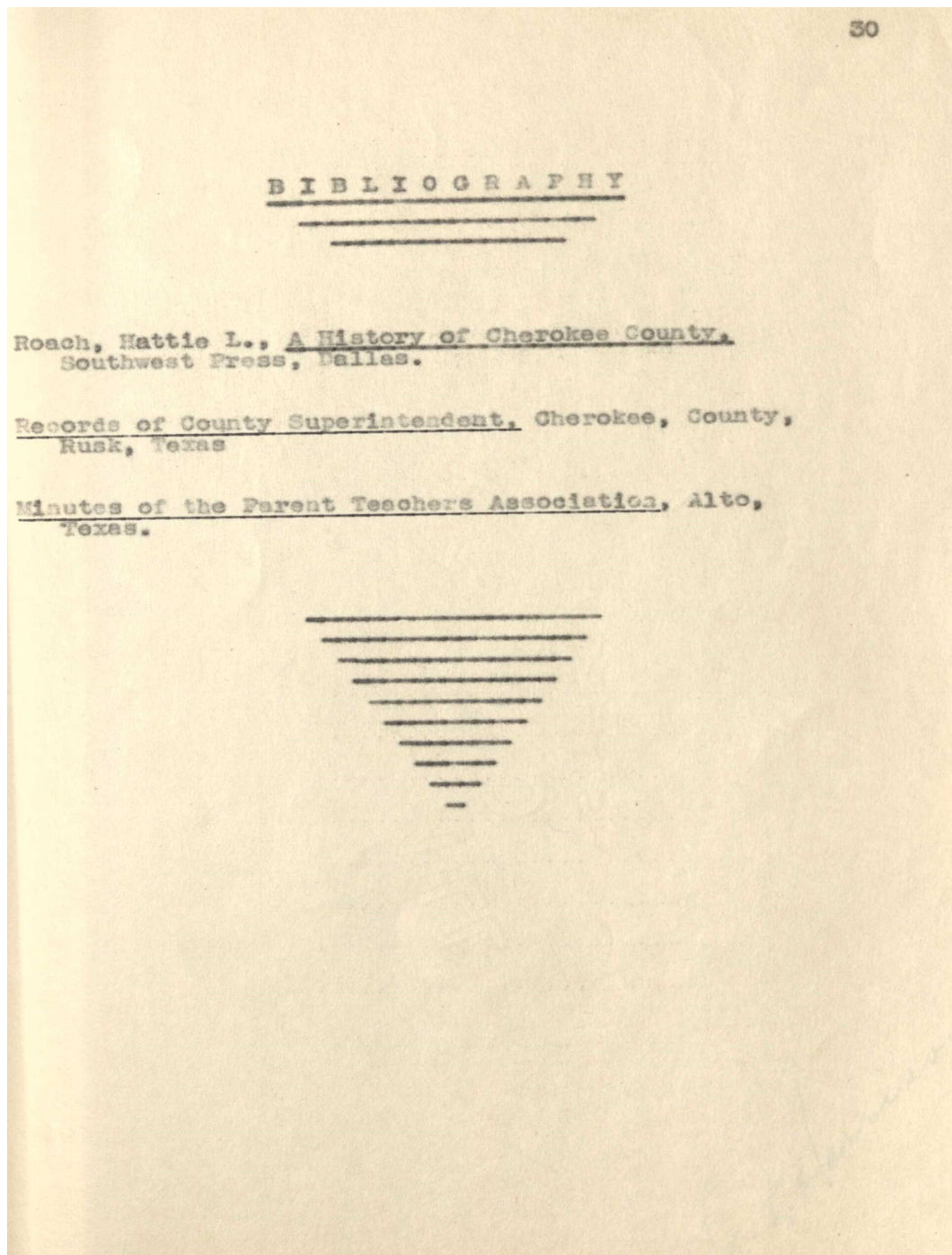
The enrollment has grown from thirty pupils in 1876 to a peak of two-hundred and forty in 1930. However, the present enrollment is only one-hundred and eighty. The scholastic census shows two-hundred and thirty persons eligible to attend school.

With the proper financial support and an enlarged faculty, the school could easily be made to serve the pressing needs of the people of the community, and really be worthy of the name that it bears.

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## A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas



Bradley, Charles O'Neal : "A History of Booker T. Washington School Alto, Texas" A Thesis in Education submitted in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for a Degree of Bachelor of Science in the division of Arts and Sciences of the PRAIRIE VIEW STATE NORMAL AND INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE, Prairie View, Texas, (May 1939).

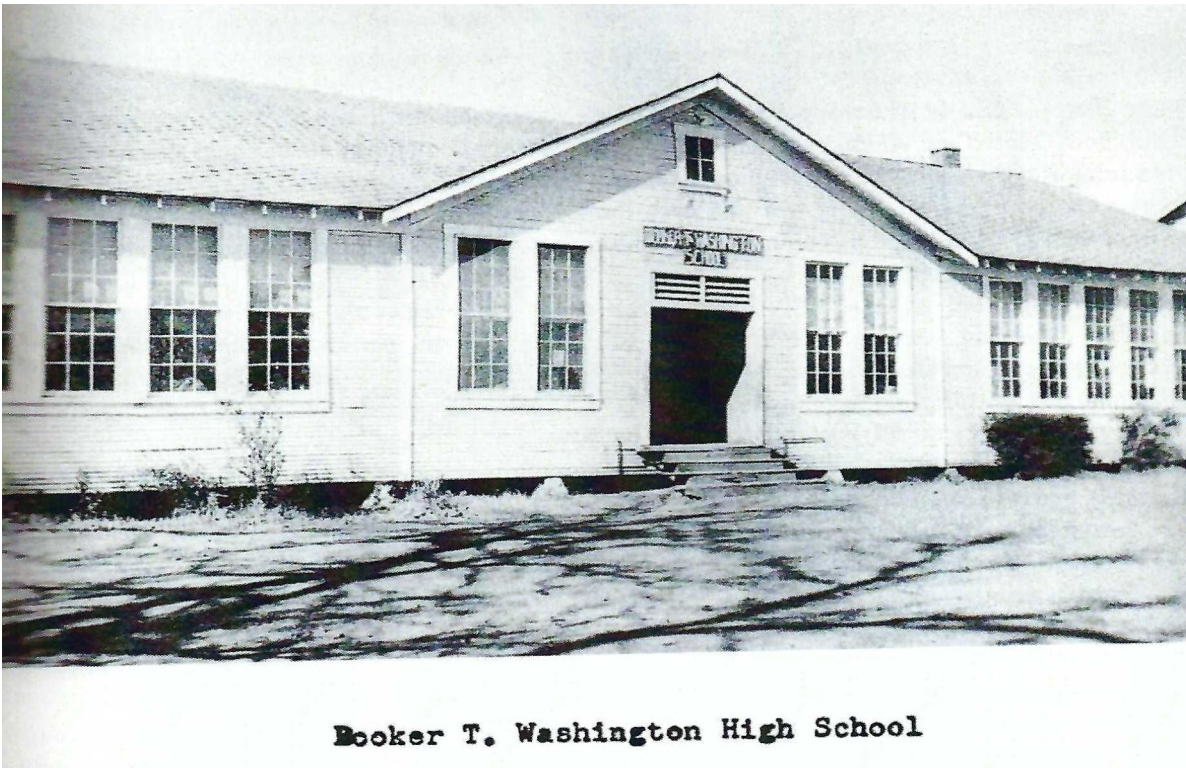
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## Historically Black Schools in southern Cherokee County, Texas

By George W. Martin



**Booker T. Washington High School**

This story began around 1820 when Texas was open to settlement by all Americans. The part of Southern Cherokee County we want to focus on lies between the confines of the Angelina and Neches Rivers; the rolling hills and rich red soils provided a host of natural resources to make this area an agricultural oasis. In the spring, this forested area is a beautiful canvas of color the Dogwood, Redbud, Honeysuckle and other woody vegetation.

In 1846 Cherokee County officially became a county. The tiny town of Alto was founded by Col. Robert F. Mitchell around 1850. Little is written about the African Americans who helped settle this area; the pictures we do find, only show a few black workers, no names are shown. The southern part of Cherokee County had a large presence of African Americans. Our ancestors had the grit and determination to establish the communities of New Hope (Alto), St. Thomas Chapel, Bradford Mountain, Linwood, Sweet Union, Weeping Mary (The Flat) and Morrill. They were the bright stars near the El Camino Real de los Tejas Trail. We want to share the stories of the great schools, strong churches and amazing families that made up these communities.

The New Hope Community, located north of Alto in the Jose M. Mora survey can be traced back to the 1870 census where blacks are listed by their names. The 1870 census reported 253,475 blacks in Texas. Without the slave system, this period saw blacks gained control over basic community institutions such as schools and churches, as they created their own communities, their families became stronger,

The early families of the New Hope Community like the Bradleys, Martins, Smiths, Connors, Harrisons, Harris, Williams, Yorks, Willis, Gibsons, Richardsons, Griffins, Jordans, Tylers, Sibleys, Lane, Barnes, and Jacksons, knew to move forward, education was the vehicle needed for future generations.

Education began in the New Hope Community in March 28, 1872 when a group of black men purchased a tract of land from George Knox and wife R. L. Knox. This group included King Solomon, William McGuahew, John Griffin, Ned Harrison, Guy Griffin, Edmond Harrison, Wilson Harrison and Wilse Richardson.



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A small log cabin was built on this tract of land and used for a church and school. This small log cabin was located near the old Jim Hogg Highway north of Alto. J.W. Floyd and Mrs. McBee were the first teachers in this two room school.

The Cherokee County School Superintendent's Office was established in January 1907 to regulate all schools both Colored and White. Between 1924-25 the New Hope Community made a bold move and built a new school with the assistance of the Julius Rosenwald Foundation, which allowed the education process for Blacks in Cherokee county to move to a new level. The school was later named after the famous Tuskegee educator Booker T. Washington. Community leaders knew education was the only way to lift the "Vail of Ignorance" from our people.

This new school with its notable educators such as John Jenkins Bradley and Delsie Selman Bradley, Jesse and Willie L. Bradford, Professor Holland, Mrs. Elnora Johnson Jackson, Martha Anderson, Mrs. Willie Whitten, Professor and Mrs. Brandon, forged the way to deliver education in a manner that brought the community to a new level of prominence. Many graduates moved on to other schools of higher education, like Mary Allen College (Crockett), Butler College and Texas College (Tyler), Jarvis College (Hawkins), Paul Quinn (Waco), Prairie View A & M (Hempstead), Texas Southern (Houston), Wiley and Bishop College (Marshall), and Huston-Tillison College (Austin). These black colleges were the only places in Texas where a Black person could get a college education.

Newly freed Texans realized that they must be educated, but they also needed the spiritual presence of Jesus Christ in their community. Rev. Henry Martin, a White minister of the Old Palestine Baptist Church near the Linwood community organized the first regular church services at New Hope, in a small brush arbor. Services were moved to a little log cabin which served as the school, Rev. Willis King and the St. Paul CME Methodist Church also used this cabin for church.

In 1878 the men of New Hope Baptist Church purchased seven acres from D. S. Findley and wife L. A. Findley. This group consisted of Frank E. Selman, Alford Gibson, Jack Gordon, Sam Griffin, Robert Tyler and Isaac Sparks. In 1881 the first church structure was built under the leadership of Rev. Jesse Tyler, the first Black pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, who passed at a young age of 35 that same year. In 1988 the Grand Old Church was destroyed by fire. This was a historic loss for the New Hope Community. Many Graduations for the Booker T. Washington School were held at this church. The famous Bell that had alerted the community for so many years was gone. The community rallied and the new church stands today.



Around 1870, west of Alto in the Peter Bean Survey, the community of St. Thomas Chapel began with a small church and school. There are no records to show how the name St. Thomas Chapel came about. This African American community came from a long line of farmers, loggers and share-croppers. There were several large plantations in the area; the Ferris Farms was started in 1846. Its owner Lorenze Sanders was a major slave owner, this farm contained over 3000+ acres. This area later became part of the Texas Prison System, and the Morrill Orchard Company.

## Historically Black Schools in southern Cherokee County, Texas

The official deed to the St. Thomas Chapel Church and cemetery only came about in 1905, when John McCrummen estate was settled. This farming community grew, county records show a small rural school here in 1884; in 1910 it became part of the Jones Chapel # 12 School District. There were 75 students attending the St. Thomas Chapel School at one time in its history. Jimmie D. Kennedy and Tommie Hardaway were among the early teachers. Mrs. Ocie Martin Sanders and Mrs. Beulah Riley, remembered by many former students, in 1946 in Alto.

St. Thomas Chapel AME Church has been and is still a mainstay for this community. It has provided for the needs of the people in the area. There is still a remnant of the old families like, Burlesons, Skinners, Mickeys, Hamiltons, Popes, Morrisons, Singletarys, Rosses, Palmers, Hudsons, Freeney's, Parkers, and Thackers.



**The Linwood School was built in 1921 as part of the Grange Hall School district # 5. This was a one teacher school, built with Rosenwald Foundation funds.**

Linwood was established in 1830 by John Durst and his wife Delilah. The battle of Nacogdoches ended here in 1832 with the surrender of Col. Piedras' army. In 1846 – 1850 Forest Hill Plantation was built by 10-15 slaves owned by Durst and his wife. In 1865 these newly freed group of Texans were the foundation of the Black community in Linwood. The Linwood Baptist Church first pastor was Rev. Tom Brown. The Deacons who provided leadership were Anthony and Sam Brown. The present day cemetery site was donated by J. M. Christie and his wife in 1895. The Linwood Colored School educated many fine students from the local families, Mrs. Eddie Monroe Ross was one of the teachers remembered. A few of the founding family members are still active today in Linwood, are the Blackshires, Browns, Whitakers, Guinns, Findlays, Smiths, Hudsons, Reagans, Reggies, and Griffins. This School closed in 1953 when Grange Hall School District # 5 consolidated with the schools in Alto. The African American students attended the segregated Booker T. Washington School in Alto.

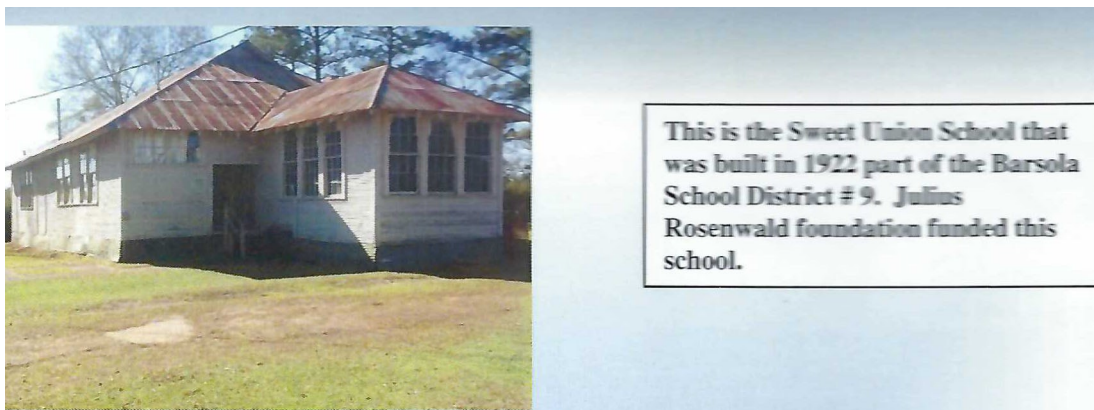
Weeping Mary is located near the Neches River, on County Road 2907. Few communities in Cherokee County attract as much curiosity as Weeping Mary. This small community was first settled after the Civil War by freed slaves from neighboring plantations. It was a "freedman's town," one of several in Cherokee County.

Community leaders established a church and school near Wallace Town Community on land bought from J. S. Landrum, March 10, 1900. The Weeping Mary School which was part of Jones Chapel #12 School District had about 40 students. Luella Sparks was among the first teachers, and it is said she was "like a First Sargent" keeping everything moving and on time. Richard Etter, Beulah Riley, Eddie Monroe Ross, Bess Howard and others followed to provide a quality education. The school lasted until World War II and then they merged with St. Thomas Chapel School only a few miles away. The church was moved to its present location between Boles and White Oak Creek in 1930 on land purchased from P. T. & Roxanna Land. There is a State Historical Marker at the Church telling its great history.



## Historically Black Schools in southern Cherokee County, Texas

Weeping Mary is known by the local residents as “The Flats”. This community was settled by the Skinners, Ross, Parkers, Greens, Hamilton, Lockharts, Lands, Lambs, Popes, Polks, Thackers, Lees, and Moores families. The great flood of 1957, where most of the homes were damaged or destroyed, showed the resilience of these great people as they worked with each other to rebuild their community. Weeping Mary has a famous neighbor, the Caddoan Mounds State Park, and the campsite of Zebulon Pike, one of the great American explorers’ in 1807. Pike’s Peak is named after him. People here still help each other and praise God on Sundays for his blessing.



Sweet Union, in the most southern part of Cherokee County began after the Emancipation Proclamation. Some of the original settlers were former slaves from the Wiley Thompson Plantation near the Angelina River. Sweet Union as it is known today was once called Hogjaw. This fertile land was good for farming and forest production. Some of the pioneer families of Sweet Union were the Calhouns, Tolivers, Tarvers, Hughes, Bases, Pooles, Thompsons, Wilsons, Beans, Rileys and Taylors.

The Lumber mills were a significant source of income for many of the area residents. The Chronister Lumber Company Mill near Wildhurst was only a few miles NE of Sweet Union and one of the most modern mills of its time. It began operations in 1901 and closed in 1955, 70% of its workers were African American.

The O. L. Payne Mill north of Wells, Texas was a major mill from 1946 to 1957. It was the first electric powered sawmill in East Texas. This small mill had a doctor, teacher, and store on site. Blacks made up a majority of the mill workers and loggers in the field. These sawmill communities had a population of over 200 people.

Nelson Jones was one of the early leaders, and part of the group that came up with the name Sweet Union. The first church was built from material out of the old commissary at Shook’s Bluff; it was called the Sweet Union Methodist Church. The Sweet Union Baptist Church and the Sweet Union Church of God in Christ Church, are the only houses of worship in the community today.

Education came to Sweet Union around 1887, when Nelson Seeden helped build the first cabin to house the school, and was it first teacher. Alice Kennedy, John J. Bradley and Rosa Hanson were some of the other early teachers. Around 1922-23 a new school was built with funds from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. When the sawmill schools in Forest and Wells were closed, the African American students were sent to Sweet Union School for their education. This new school made many advances under the leadership of Professor W. B. Latimore and teachers like Mrs. Jessie Belle Taylor, Mr. & Mrs. Bradley and Brunette Willis. In 1953, the schools 9th – 12th grades moved to the Booker T. Washington School in Alto, and in 1965 all grades were integrated in the Wells ISD.

## Historically Black Schools in southern Cherokee County, Texas

Morrill is located south of Alto on FM 1911. This community sprang up out of the sale of the Ferris Farm. The Morrill Orchard Company began in 1903 with land purchased from the Ferris farm. It was the largest peach operation in Cherokee County. There was a store, Post Office, Church and School in Morrill. The Colored School was built in 1920-21 with funds from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation. It educated the children whose parents worked for the Morrill Orchard Co. and local sawmills. Mrs. Maxine Bradley and Mr. O. J. Anderson were the early teachers. This school was consolidated with the Booker T. Washington School in Alto after WWII.

The African American farm families in this community were the Morgans, Griffins, Freeneys, Clemmons, and Houstons.



North of Alto was the Bradford Mt. School. They came out of the church building into a new Rosenwald building in 1923. This small 2 teacher school was the pride of “the Mountain” as the locals called it. G. W. Bradford and his brother Jess Bradford help lead the list of great leaders that came out of this small community. Jess Bradford was a great teacher and County Extension Agent. He was among the first Blacks to get a Master of Education from the prestigious Cornell University in New York State. George W. Bradford was a great local educator, and the Rusk African American School bears his name. Turner Williams began his teaching career at the Bradford Mt. School. The other great families on Bradford Mt. were the McCants, Tylers, Mallards, Tidwells and Walkers.

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