

Booker T. Washington Colored School
Dover, Delaware

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July 24, 1991
ED 603

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History and Philosophy of Education

Booker T. Washington School, now West Dover Elementary, has had a long and interesting history and has undergone both a name change as well as numerous additions and renovations. It has changed from a small all colored school serving grades 1-8 in the Dover Special School District to a sprawling, integrated school serving students from grades K-4 in the Capital School District.

Prior to its construction in 1921-1922, "colored" children attended 2 schools in downtown Dover; the 2 room Red Hall School on Division Street housing grades 5-8 with 2 teachers and the Slaughter Street 4 room, 4 teacher school housing grades 1-4. These schools, while segregated, were under the authority of the newly named Dover Special School District. (the School Laws of 1919 created 13 special school districts statewide, mainly in urban areas.) All the funds for the initial construction of Booker T. Washington School came from the Delaware School Auxiliary Association, endowed by the generosity and philanthropy of Mr. Pierre S. Dupont of Wilmington. In fact, many in the Black community refer to it as a Dupont school. However, I was unable to find any records of construction plans or costs, though it had a total cubic footage of 234,813 according to 1941 insurance valuation records in the state archives. The builder was Mr. E.M. Henderer.

Booker T. Washington was officially opened on November 13, 1922 with a triumphal march of 210 students and 6 teachers from the old buildings to the new, located on 6 acres of land on the western edge of Dover. Picture taking, speeches, devotions, games, and singing helped mark the occasion. Persons attending included District Supt., W. B. Thornburgh, Dr. William C. Jason, principal of the State College for colored children, Harry C. McSherry, Editor of the Index, a weekly newspaper, plus members of the school board and Delaware School Auxiliary Association.

The classes were broken down as follows:

Slaughter Street School

Grade	# students	teacher
1	42	Mrs. Edmonia Ruffin
2	36	Mrs. Flossye Buckner
3	49	Mrs. Carrie Blackson
4	28	Mrs. Eva Raikes

Red Hall School

Grade	# students	teacher
5-6	37	Mrs. Genevieve Anderson
7-8	18	Miss Mary Brown

The first addition to Booker T. Washington in 1934 consisted of 4 classrooms, 2 on either side of the main structure, a total of 103,078 cubic feet according to the 1941 insurance valuation records and cost roughly \$38,000. The district received an appropriation of \$28,000 from the State Board of Public Instruction and a \$9,000 Federal Grant to fund these additions and alterations. The architect for the project was George Edwin Pope, Rupert & Fulenwider of Wilmington was the general contractor, and J.E. Workman, Inc. of Wilmington was the roofing and sheet metal contractor. The contract provisions called for an hourly wage of \$1.10 for skilled labor, \$.45 for unskilled, no Sunday work, a 30 hour work week, and no convict labor.

As a matter of interest, Delaware State College, around 1934, was forced to upgrade its curriculum from a junior college/normal school to 4 year status in order to receive accreditation by the Middle Atlantic States. Therefore, it was necessary for the "colored" schools to provide a 9th grade education since this was now required for entrance to Delaware State. Thus, Booker T. Washington reorganized, as did many "colored" schools, to add a junior high encompassing grades 7-9 in 1934-35. At the same time, Home Economics and Manual Arts were added to the curriculum. I spoke with Mr. W.C. Laws (Dr. Ruth Laws' husband) the first shop teacher and he described the program as generally a bad situation. They met in a regular classroom located in the basement, stored lumber in the cloakroom, used all hand tools, and had no hot water. A Mrs. Floyd was the first home economics teacher and I understand the situation wasn't a great deal better.

In 1941, The General Assembly appropriated \$94,000 to improve the educational facilities of Booker T. Washington. An agricultural teacher was hired on a 1/3 time basis at a salary of \$1800 (part federal funding) with \$200 for travel and \$100 for supplies. The 10th grade level was also added at this time.

Another addition consisting of 2 or 3 classrooms on the west end of the building was accomplished in 1952-53. At this time music was added to the curriculum and Thelma Draine was hired for this purpose.

In 1952, Wm. Henry was opened and the 9th and 10th grades were transferred there, turning Booker T. Washington back into a grades 1-8 school once again. Harley S. Taylor was the first Wm. Henry principal followed by James Hardcastle who was principal until the closing of Booker T. Washington and Wm. Henry as "colored" schools in 1965. At this point the buildings were converted by the district and made a part of the total educational system of the district. Booker T. Washington's name was changed around this time to West Dover Elementary and became a first through 6th grade school for awhile. The name change for this school created much dissension within the community and no official reason was ever given for the change though a number of stories evolved.

A major renovation took place in 1976. At this point, the existing classrooms were remodeled to incorporate the open classroom concept and the former Green Room (original all purpose, 500 person assembly, cafeteria, etc.) was converted to the school library. The architect for the project was Thomas J. Walters of Wilmington, EJT Construction Co. of Dover was the general contractor, and Diamond State Engineering of Dover was in charge of the mechanical engineering aspect. The final addition that I was able to document was a 4 classroom addition on the back of the building in 1989.

S. Marcellus Blackburn was the first principal of Booker T. Washington. At first, in addition to administrative duties, he also taught 8th grade math and English. His principalship there spanned 40 years from 1923-1963 when he retired after 47 years in public education (1916-1963--46 in Delaware). Today there is a hallway dedicated to him at the West Dover Elementary.

Since, there has been a succession of principals, some staying only a short time. Helen Hicks, retired secretary (1990) at Booker T. Washington and West Dover, said she worked under about 10 principals during her 35 year career. She was also a former student of Booker T. as was James Hardcastle who was an 8th grader in 1927. These principals included Herman Clayton, Mary Hearne, Henry J. Papernick,

Herman Glass, Joseph Threadgill, Wesley Hall, 1 year without a principal when Martin Duffy died early in the year (Martin Burns and Earl Corchran looked in on them occasionally) and finally Dan Kingery who remained from 1975-1990.

Some interesting trivia which I picked up from looking at old registers and talking to various people are as follows:

Jim Hardcastle told me that as an 8th grader in 1927, all 8th grade boys and girls walked from Booker T. Washington along the railroad tracks to Delaware State College once a week where the boys could choose from woodworking, auto mechanics, and agriculture while the girls participated in home economics. This was going on before, probably as early as 1925 he thought and continued for some time afterwards. They walked regardless of the weather.

In 1927-1928 according to Mr. Blackburn's register, there were 400 books in the school library.

In 1925 there were 190 school days. By 1930-31, this number had dropped to 185, and by 1948-49 the number had dropped to our present figure of 180.

Yearly salaries were as follows:

year	amount	# years experience
1925-26	\$ 750	1
1927-28	1000	5
1930-31	1000	5
1931-32	1300	15
1938-39	1200	21
1948-49	2800	31

The information in this short history came from research of old DPI records stored in the Hall of Records, and conversations with James Hardcastle, W.C. Laws, Juanita Cooper, and Helen Hicks. There is a great deal of information out there but it is scattered in many places. I also gleaned some information from old registers which are presently stored in the kindergarten wing at West.

1934

. Addition to
School

