

The History of Lincoln Public School, Fayette MO By Tim Jackman

In Missouri, the first establishment of any public school system was in 1839. Shortly after the Civil War of 1861, the US Congress created the Freedman's Bureau in 1865 and one year later that agency was given the authority to establish Black schools. It was five years later in 1871 that Lincoln Public School was established. The public school system in Howard County was under the oversight of **A.F. Willis**, County Commissioner. For many years, there were small "one room schools" located in the small communities of the county. These schools were for white children.

At the time Lincoln opened there were 130 "colored" children of school age in the district. **Willis Anderson** was the teacher. Although little is known about the structure of the building, it is assumed based on the number of school age children that the schoolhouse was more than a one-room building. It was in 1882 that land was purchased on nearly three acres and a school building constructed at 321 East Hackberry (part of the acreage was sold to Second Baptist Church).

On March 5, 1923, shortly after eight o'clock a.m. the square frame school building met the unfortunate fate of a fire due to a "defective flue and was practically totally destroyed" according to The Fayette Advertiser. The students finished the school term by attending classes at the Second Baptist Church and St. Paul Methodist Church. After a successful passage of a school bond on May 10, 1923, to support construction of new colored (Proposition II) and white school buildings, a two-story rectangular red brick building with eight classrooms at a cost of approximately \$16,000 was formerly opened in October 1923. The building was considered an impressive and according to the local paper "...the new building is constructed according to the principles governing the best schoolhouse architecture in the country today." Also, the building was equipped with a telephone.



According to records **Andrew Cravens** was principal from 1915 to 1935. In 1920 enrollment was estimated at over 150 students. Teachers at that time were **Mrs. N.D. Diggs, Miss Alexena Johnson and Miss Lillian Hinch**. Three years later in 1923 enrollment had grown to 180 students. In 1935 **J.J. Williams** took over as principal at Lincoln. Students attending school did so up until the 10th grade. Those wishing to continue their formal education had to attend high school in Dalton or Boonville (Sumner High School). **Fannie Marie Tolson**, who most now remember, attended school there in 1928, and later taught from 1952 to 1960. She then became principal from 1960 to 1966.

Some of the many dedicated educators whose contributions to Lincoln School have earned them great honor are:

A.B Barber (Supt.), J.E. Sutton (Supt.), William N. Clark (Supt.), C.C. Hamilton (Principal), Emma Turner (Principal), Floyd Ancell (Principal), Marabelle Moore (Principal), Anna Mae Baskett, Barbara Alexander, Bernal Chomeau, C. Amelia Turner, Emma Lincoln, Ernest Boone, Frankie Hurt, Irma Adams Johnson, James Dickerson, Lawrence Johnson, Lela May, Lillian Kemp, Marjorie Casson, M. Anna Tolson, Mary Jane Davis, Mary Power, Ms. Coley, Pauline Foster, Rosie Barnes, Ruth Shepard, Virginia Stemmons, Willa Estill, W. Elphra Curtis and a host of other administrators and teachers that served Lincoln.

William N. Clark became Superintendent in 1954 (and served until retirement in 1976) and deserves a great deal of credit for his leadership. It was during his tenure that integration began in 1955 when Lincoln students entering the 11th grade and 12th grades were integrated with other white students. This was precipitated by the landmark US decision "Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka." Two years later the 9th and 10th grades were integrated. In the fall of 1961, the 7th and 8th grades were integrated.



Many of the classroom materials including books were passed down from the white to colored schools. Although the "hand-me-down" books may have been seen as inferior, many students saw this as a plus since several of the books had answers to questions recorded in them.

Lincoln Public School was opened for ninety-five years when the doors were finally closed in May 1966 and the remaining grades integrated. The memory of Lincoln School is kept alive by the Lincoln School Memorial Committee. This group provides fundraiser public meals to support their activities including scholarships, Juneteenth Celebrations, and other community events. That committee and other local organizations, including the Fayette American Legion post, provided a memorial marker and flagpole at the site of the school on Hackberry Street.



A school bell from the Lincoln building is in a place of honor at the Fayette Public Schools.



Lincoln Public School provided the foundation and rich beginning of a formal education for well over thousands of African-American students. The students were blessed to have such devoted teachers, administrators and a community that paved the way and opened doors to create the key to success in immeasurable ways for all.