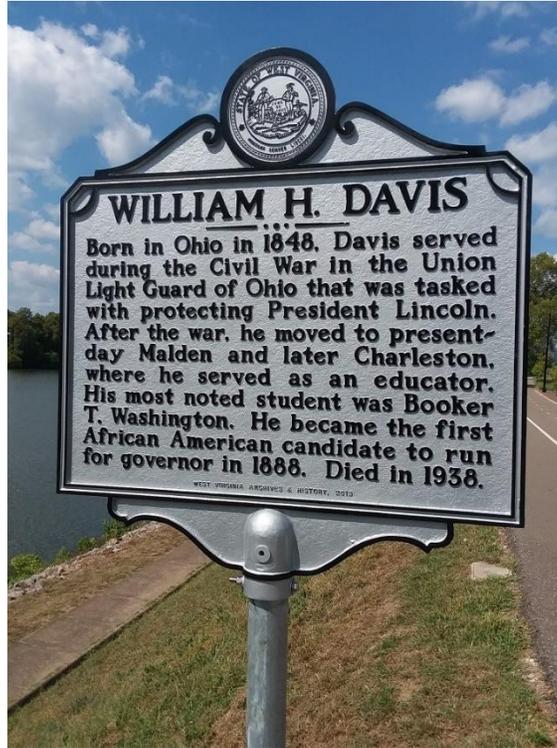


ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY MARCH 24



William H. Davis, long-time educator, who was Booker T. Washington's first teacher, died in Charleston on March 24, 1938.

CSO: SS.8.9, SS.8.23, ELA.8.1

Investigate the Document: (*Early Negro Education in West Virginia, R 305.896 W898*)

1. Which industry did many African Americans work in during the years following the Civil War? What importance does this industry have in the annals of West Virginia history?
2. What prominent individual established a school for young African Americans in the Malden-area that would be headed by William Davis?
3. What three individuals were a product of Davis's instruction at the school, exhibiting the fact that his school was a success?

Think Critically: Describe the impact of William H. Davis and Booker T. Washington on African American education and West Virginia history. Do you think African Americans were afforded the opportunity for equal educational facilities and instruction during the nineteenth century? If not, what differences existed?

EARLY NEGRO EDUCATION IN WEST VIRGINIA 29

He was a man of fundamental education and unusual native ability. This pioneer opened at Chapel Hollow, or Salines, two and one-half miles from Malden, in 1865, the first Negro school in the Kanawha Valley. He thereafter taught at Uneeda in Boone County and later became the founder of the First Baptist Church of Charleston. The following year Miss Lucy James from Gallia County, Ohio, opened the first Negro school in Charleston. Among the first patrons were Matthew Dillon, Lewis Rogers, Alexander Payne, Lewis Jones, Perry Harden, Julius Whiting, and Harvey Morris. Mrs. Landonia Sims had charge of the school one year also.

At this time Rev. Charles O. Fisher, a Methodist Episcopal Minister of Maryland, had a private and select school which was later merged with the free public school, between 1866 and 1869. Rev. J. W. Dansberry, another Methodist Episcopal minister from Baltimore, Maryland, belonging as did Mr. Fisher to the Washington Conference, served also as a teacher while preaching in this State, as the Simpson M. E. Church was during these years being developed and was in 1867 housed in a comfortable building on Dickinson and Quarrier Streets. Mr. C. O. Fisher was a well educated man, but Mr. Dansberry depended largely on natural attainments. Rev. Harvey Morris, another minister, opened a public school at Sissonville in 1873, and Rev. J. C. Taylor another at Crown Hill in 1882. This work was accelerated, too, by the assistance from the Freedmen's Bureau, which sent to this section C. H. Howard, a brother of General O. O. Howard, to inspect the field, and later sent one Mr. Sharp to teach in Charleston. Rev. I. V. Bryant, who had taught the first school in Guyandotte in 1873 and served there until 1877, taught the Negro school at Baker's Fork, about two and one-half miles from Charleston, in 1888, when pastor of the First Baptist Church of this city.

→ One of the first schools in Kanawha County was organized at Malden, which immediately after the Civil

30 WEST VIRGINIA COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE BULLETIN

War had a much larger and more promising Negro population than the city of Charleston. Many Negroes had been brought to Kanawha County, and after their freedom many others came to labor in the salt works, as was the case of Booker T. Washington, who came to Malden from Halesford, Virginia. This private school was conducted by Mr. William Davis, the first teacher of Booker T. Washington.

Mr. Davis' career is more than interesting. He was born in Columbus, Ohio, November 27, 1848, and remained there until his thirtieth year, spending parts of the years 1861, 1862, 1863 in Chillicothe. During these years he mastered the fundamentals of an English education. He moved back to Columbus in the fall of 1863. On December 18th of that year Mr. Davis enlisted in the Union "Light Guard", called "Lincoln's Body Guard", at Columbus. He served in the army eighteen months and was discharged at Camp Todd Barracks, Washington, D. C., June 24, 1865. He then returned to Columbus and after remaining there about a month went to Cincinnati, after which he ran on a boat from Gallipolis to Charleston for about four weeks.

About this time the people of Malden, under the wise guidance of Lewis Rice, a beloved pioneer minister, better known among the early Negroes of the State as Father Rice because of his persistent efforts in behalf of religion and education, had decided to establish a school for the education of their children. Mr. William Davis thereupon abandoned his work on the boat and became the teacher of this private school at Malden, in 1865. This school was established in the home of Father Rice. As the school had to be conducted in the very bedroom of this philanthropist, it was necessary for him to take down his bed in the morning and bring in the benches, which would be replaced in the evening by the bed in its turn. The school was next held in the same church thereafter constructed, and finally when it ceased to be a private institution, in the schoolroom pro-

EARLY NEGRO EDUCATION IN WEST VIRGINIA 31

vided at public expense as one of the schools of the county.

About the only white person who seemed to give any encouragement to the education of Negroes at Malden was General Lewis Ruffner. It seems, however, that his interest was not sufficient to provide those facilities necessary to ease the burden of this pioneer teacher. Yet when we think that out of this school came such useful teachers as William T. McKinney, H. B. Rice, and one of the greatest educators of the world, Booker T. Washington, we must conclude that it was a success,

Mr. Davis's reputation as a teacher rapidly extended through the Kanawha Valley. He was chosen by the board of education of Charleston to take charge of its Negro school in 1871, when it was just a two-room establishment. In this field, however, Mr. Davis had been preceded, as mentioned above, by noble workers in behalf of the Negroes. Building upon the foundation which other Negroes had laid, he soon had a school of four instead of two rooms, and before he ceased to be principal, it had sufficiently increased to have a well graded system, standardized instruction, and up-to-date methods.

Mr. Davis' early assistants in this work were Charles P. Keys, P. B. Burbridge, Harry Payne, James Bullard, and William T. McKinney. He received some cooperation from a few white persons, the chief one of whom was Mr Edward Moore, a native of Pennsylvania who was the father of Spencer Moore, now a bookseller in the city of Charleston. Mr. Edward Moore taught a select school for Negroes and helped the cause considerably. Mr. Davis served about twenty-four years in all as principal, although he was a member of the teaching staff for a much longer period, having served forty-seven years altogether.

Because of the unsettled policy of the Charleston public schools they changed principals every year or two, to the detriment of the system and the student body.

32 WEST VIRGINIA COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE BULLETIN

Rev. J. W. Dansberry served for a while as principal, and H. B. Rice, who entered the service as an assistant in 1888, became principal some time later, serving about four years. Mr. Davis, who had been demoted to a subordinate position, was then reinstated, but not long thereafter came Mr. C. W. Boyd, who had rendered valuable service in Clarksburg and had later found employment in the public schools of Charleston. He succeeded Mr. Davis as principal. At the close of one year, however, Mr. Rice was reinstated and served for a number of years, at the expiration of which Mr. Boyd became principal and remained in the position long enough to give some stability to the procedure and plans of the system and to secure the confidence of the patrons of the schools. Some of the valuable assistants serving during this period were William Ross, Miss Blanche Jeffries, Mrs. Fannie Cobb Carter, and Byrd Prillerman, whose career as a teacher includes a short period of service in the Charleston public schools.

At what is now Institute in Union district, there was established in the fall of 1872 another Negro school, opened on the subscription basis in the home of Mrs. Mollie Berry, nee Cabell. Mrs. Berry was the first teacher of this school.* The building is occupied at present by Mr. James and is owned now by Mrs. Berry's daughter, Mrs. Cornie Robinson. In the spring of 1873, Mr. William Scott Brown, who had by marriage connected himself with the Cabell family, was elected trustee in the Union district, and by his efforts a Jenny Lind

* In the summer of 1874 there was circulated among the teachers of this school a petition in behalf of Miss Bertha Chappelle, who was chosen to teach the second term of the high school. In this way the last month of the session was taught with but one scholar attending. In the year 1875, Miss Mollie Berry was chosen to teach this school, and she was followed in 1876 by Frank C. James, who had taught previously the first public school at Kanawha City, in 1866. He was succeeded in 1877 by Mr. Pitt Campbell, who was followed by Mrs. Bettie Cabell in 1878. She was in turn followed by Mr. Brack Cabell. In 1880 the school was moved to the site now occupied by the two-roomed village school and was called the Piney Road School. Mr. J. B. Cabell was chosen teacher for the first year.

In 1881 Miss Emma Ferguson was hired to teach this school. Miss Ferguson, now Mrs. Emma Jones, is still an active teacher. In 1882 Miss Addie Wells taught the school and she was followed by Miss Annie Cozzins. In 1884 W. C. Cabell was in charge. He was succeeded in 1885 by Otho Wells, and he by Mrs. Julia Brown in 1886.