



History of The Napoleonville/W. H. Reed High Schools

"A Journey Back In Time"

Prior to 1948, during the era of dual school systems in the South, there was no public high school in Assumption Parish for black students. Those interested in pursuing an education beyond the 9th grade had to attend secondary schools for blacks in the adjoining parishes of Ascension and Lafourche. Yet, others attended private secondary schools for blacks that were part of the curriculum of Leland College, and Straight College (N.O.), and Sager Brown—a United Methodist-related black school located in Baldwin, LA.

Our parents, educators, and community leaders had a *great idea!* — a centrally located secondary school for black youths. "*One can resist an invasion of armies,*" Victor Hugo wrote, "*but not an idea whose time has come*". Their ideas, dreams, and goals were attained through concrete action.

Around 1939, the Assumption Parish School Board decided to construct the present Napoleonville Primary School main building. In the early years of its existence (Napoleonville Jr. High as it was called) was a little more than an elementary school with ninth (9th) grade added. Yes, the door was cracked. But in actuality, most Blacks only had a foot across the threshold. As time passed, and the school grew in student enrollment, higher grades were added. Twelveth grade (12th) was added to the curriculum in 1948. Thus, Napoleonville Colored High School emerged as the first secondary educational facility for black children. It's Motto: "*Education Is Guidance.*" The plaque is still on the wall in the original building. There were five (5) students in the first graduating class of 1948. They were:

- (1) Hattie Butler Auery
- (2) Lois Hawkins Parker
- (3) Agnes Lewis Smith
- (4) Daniel Mitchell (deceased)
- (5) Gertie Sparks Patterson

The original building — a very distinct structure— set amid spacious lawns lined by oak trees, has stood the test of time. It is an extraordinary composition of wood, stone and glass overlooking the town of Napoleonville. Noted for its octagon-shaped office, beautiful wooden floors, centrally located skylight and chimney, the structure has survived hurricanes and modern renovations. The two-roomed white wooden building that housed the lunchroom, band room, and later the Teachers' Lounge, was torn down and moved off the site many years ago.

Once there were special people in the educational arena that had to leave us, but left the light burning so that we might follow. Former principals of Napoleonville Colored High were Mr. George Parker, Jr., Mr. Lawrence A. Southall (both deceased), and Ms. Ruth Dorsey, who served as an interim principal, while Mr. Southall pursued a higher degree.

Times changed—both socially and politically, the enrollment grew, the need to expand the curriculum was evident, extra curricular activities were needed, and of course, modern facilities were the order of the day.

In 1953, under the continued administration of Mr. Lawrence Southall, a very elegant, spacious, and modern new structure was constructed on the adjoining grounds and a name change was in the making due to the social and political atmosphere that engulfed the area at the time. In 1953, the name, Napoleonville Colored High faded into oblivion and the name W. H. Reed High emerged in 1954. The school was named after Rev. William H. Reed, former pastor of First Israel Baptist Church, Belle Rose, LA. and a strong advocate of education. He also taught classes in a small school housed on the church grounds.

The newly constructed structure housed grades eight through twelve. A new gymnasium was also built— to accommodate P. E. classes for both genders, and of course, BASKETBALL— the main sport at that time, which produced many outstanding players and brought accolades to the school under the directions of such noted coaches as Mr. Simpson Southall, (retired), Mr. Nathaniel Lewis, Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Assumption Parish, Mr. Alvin Sylvester (retired), and Ms. Verdell Chatman (retired). As time passed, FOOTBALL was added as a main sport. Mr. Nathaniel Lewis served as the first coach. Some of the outstanding quarterbacks, running backs, place kickers, and other players are with us tonight. Many outstanding leaders in the fields of education,

medicine, business and other endeavors passed through the doors of W. H. Reed High School.

The demise of W. H. Reed High School occurred in 1970 — a victim of desegregation. It has been 26 years since Reed High closed its doors as a secondary institution.

Some buildings disappeared due to the ravages of time. On the other hand, a number of the original structures remain as standards of superiority.

Each school's exit marked a well-deserved entry into the annuals of history.

Compiled By
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Faculty—

Principal players in the capturing and nurturing of the minds of many, many students. Their roles as administrators, teachers, and leaders seem especially important given the special needs of students, subject matter, materials, and equipment. They helped scores of Black students reach their educational goals. We thank them for their contributions to the academic climate of Black youths in Assumption Parish.

1. Oscar Williams
2. Nancy Walton
3. Permilla Reed
4. Perscilla P. Johnson
5. John L. Comeaux
6. Cleo Southall
7. Mary B. Terry
8. Jeffery England
9. Alvin Sylvester
10. Melba Reed Sullivan
11. Edith Parker
12. Willis Hadrick
13. Walter Milton
14. Marion Reed Melancon
15. Octavia J. Lewis
16. Clarence Sims
17. Verdell Smothers
18. Zelpha Perkins
19. Mr. Porter
20. Mr. Spain
21. Othello Celestine

22. Shirley Burd
23. Katie Cockerham
24. Florence Bowser
25. Ollie Jarvis
26. Roberta Southall
27. Simpson Southall
28. Verdell Chapman
29. Harding Anderson
30. Joseph Singleton
31. Thomas Bailey
32. Nathaniel Lewis
33. Ms. Irvin
34. Loyalene Wilson
35. Frances M. Stevenson

Betty LeBlanc
Roslyn Pugh