

THE TIGER



1916 - 1969



History provided by Aux Dames Social Club

Morehouse High School — 1969

Historical Sketch

There were few schools in Morehouse Parish before 1910. In the early years schools for blacks in Bastrop were under the auspices of the Baptist and Methodist Churches, (St. John and Mt. Olive). School at this time operated only four months, two in the summer and two in the winter. The first two teachers were Mr. R. G. Steptoe from Roanoke, Virginia and Mrs. Viola Harrison also of Virginia.

In 1913-14 the Black citizens of Morehouse sensed the need for more education for their children.

The Morehouse Parish School Board appropriated the sum of \$1,500.00 for the construction and maintenance of a Black school in or near Bastrop in accordance with the provisions of the Jan F. Slater Fund.

There was a "colored school board" or "trustees" consisting of Alex Thomas, B. J. Greenberry, George Scott, W. T. Grant, P. H. Hamlin, and Jordan Whitlow who were instrumental in securing money for the purchase of twenty acres of land from Captain Polk to build Morehouse Parish Training School.

Modern education for blacks in Morehouse Parish had its beginning in Bastrop on November 29, 1915. On this date George Scott and William Grant, representing the "Morehouse Parish Colored Grade School," purchased the land for the school building. The property was purchased from Leonidas N. Polk for the sum of \$775.00.

The contract for the construction of the school building was given to Mr. McBride. The lumber was brought from West Monroe, La. by wagon. Mr. W. T. Grant was one of the drivers. The completed school was a two story six room building. Three rooms were on the second floor and three on the first floor. The first floor had sliding doors and could be converted into an Auditorium with a stage.

In January 1916, Morehouse Parish Training School was established with a school term of eight months. The first session was held in the Pythian Hall on High Street. More teachers were added, namely Mrs. Lucille Griffin and Mrs. Mattie Pierce.

Later, in 1916, when the structure was completed it was occupied immediately. Mr. Rexford Gilbert Steptoe was the first principal of Morehouse Parish Training School. The first faculty members in the new building were Mrs. Hunter C. Steptoe, Mrs. Lucille Griffin, Mrs. Mattie Pierce and Mrs. Viola Harrison. The courses taught in the upper level of the school were English, history, mathematics, science, agriculture and Domestic Science (sewing and cooking).

The first teachers for the Domestic Science class were Mrs. Viola Clark, Miss Ida Allen and Mrs. Tivis Whitlow Hunter.

There was a need for a workshop for the boys. The Knights of Honor Lodge gave their hall to the school. The boys demolished it and built the first workshop. Soon afterwards, a Principal's home, was built by the boys, next a Girls' Dormitory. Later a larger Principal's home was built and the smaller one was used for the Boys' Dormitory. There was a large farm on campus, poultry house and wash house (for girls) built by the boys.

The first workshop was eventually torn down and then a larger one built.

Many homes throughout the community were built by the boys in the shop class. Most of the shop work on campus and the carpentry in the community was under the supervision of David Smith.

To hear of Teacher Training in a high school may come as shock to most who hear or read this. Well, it happened at Morehouse Training School. The Teacher Training program was carried out as it is in Colleges and Universities now.

Several courses in Education were taught prior to practice teaching. Classroom Management was one of the texts. There was another by "Woolter." The students were taught how to make lesson plans, keep a register and make a monthly report.

The students were assigned in groups to observe various teachers. After a few weeks of this, taking notes, and discussing, one of the group would be selected to teach one subject or class for a week. The academically stronger student would teach first, then another would teach the same subject. The first student would go on to another subject. The changes continued to take place until each one had a chance to teach each subject.

They also had to take charge of other activities - opening exercises, recess, as well as janitorial duties.

If a student was thought to be weak, he was placed with a strong co-worker.

Mrs. Channell would teach songs for the seasons as well as different games. For many years one could hear

"Swing the shining sickle,

Cut the ripened grains,

Flash it in the sunlight

Swing it once again." . . .

At Thanksgiving time, or in the morning

"Raise your hands if they are clean,

by your teacher to be seen,

clap, clap, clap for this is true,

Dirty hands we can't endure."

The cooperating teachers reported to Mrs. Channell. The other in the group also reported their opinion of the work carried on.

Seasonal quotations were taught and recited by the pupils each morning. In the middle and upper grades, there was a probability of "The



First School Building — 1916

First School Building — 1916

Lord's Prayer" and "The Twenty-third Psalm," "First Psalm" or some other scripture being read. Sometimes a story with a "moral" would be read or told.

After completion of this course in the tenth grade, one received a Second Grade Certificate lasting three years. Then one had to go to summer school, if he had not done so, to renew his certificate.

When the eleventh grade was added, the same general procedures were used. However, at the conclusion of the course, one received a First Grade Certificate, good for five years before having to go to summer school.

Mr. Rexford Gilbert Steptoe was the first principal of Morehouse Training School. When one thinks of education for Negroes, during that time, he automatically thinks of R. G. Steptoe. He served the whole parish, as Morehouse Training School was the only school with classes above the seventh grade.

Along with the position of administrator, he served in any other place where he was needed.

He was baseball coach, football coach, teacher of Mechanical Arts, Agriculture, helped with the chorus and the band.

Oh, yes, there was a band composed of a few students and about as many teachers because most children were not able to purchase the instruments.

Mr. Steptoe had a sort of fatherly concern for the children. He was principal before 8:45 a.m. and after 3:45 p.m. Monday through Friday, and (do not count Saturday and Sunday out). He would ride around on his horse to observe.

The majority, young and old, would be happy to see him coming. But if there were some children in some mischievous act, they dreaded going to school Monday morning, because they had to go before the "judge," and that was Mr. R. G. Steptoe. He had the contact and the "know-how" to get some of the best equipment made for schools. He would take time and sit down and talk with students he thought needed advice.

If one's parents were unable to pay the meager charges for living on campus, he would find a way for them to work for their board and/or lodging. This might mean scratching his head a bit, but he did it. It sounds odd to hear this about a small town high school which was not really a high school until about 1928. But there really was a dormitory for those who came in from the rural.

Some of those parents referred to it as the "college."

Mr. Steptoe was well-known and well-liked by the masses.

Mr. Steptoe left in the fall of 1926 and Mrs. L. M. Channell accepted the duties of Principal until Mr. H. A. Dillon came in 1927. Because of the wealth of experiences she brought as having served as Supervisor of Schools in Morehouse Parish and as a teacher at Morehouse Training School and her strong belief in encouraging everyone to work toward his fullest capacity, she served most efficiently in this position.

In 1927, Henry Austine Dillon, Sr., assumed the principalship of Morehouse Parish Training School. Dillon, had been greatly influenced by his brother, O. W. Dillon. His brother had prodded and enforced pressure upon him during his earlier years. He had encouraged him to become a leader or a helper in the improvement of the educational system for the school's girls and boys. Not understanding the reasons his brother had exerted so much pressure, the realization soon became apparent in Bastrop. Dillon had been assigned the duty of principal, the position his brother held in Kentwood, Louisiana.

During Dillon's early years vast changes were taking place in Black schools throughout the State. In Morehouse Parish the only Black High School was located in Bastrop. This presented a problem for the many young black people in the Parish who had the desire to attend a high school. Dormitory space was provided for the girls. Mrs. Channell, who had served as Acting Principal prior to Dillon's tenure, was in charge of the girls' dormitory. The destruction by fire of this building was one of the first major problems that the school was to encounter in terms of needed facilities.

On July 3, 1928, a contract was made with McBride Co. to construct two frame buildings. During the school session 1928-29 the facilities were constructed. One of the structures was considered to be one of the most modern for Black students in Northeast Louisiana. A device, which was relatively unheard of in Black schools, was installed in the new facility. This timing device was used for signaling the schedule of classes.

In 1927 a music teacher, Miss Magnolia Williams of Kansas City, Missouri, was hired by the School Board. This young lady brought with her a wealth of experiences, and was an asset to the school. Later, she and Principal Dillon were married.

With the growth of the school plant, Principal Dillon had to give up personal supervision of the Agriculture Department and work completely with the secondary work and administration of the school. The Dillons remained in Bastrop until 1931.

Mr. Frank W. Patty served as principal of Morehouse from 1931-1933. He was from the small southern rural town of Baldwin, near New Orleans, Louisiana.

During those times principals taught classes as well as carried out administrative duties.

Mr. Patty worked with the Drama Club and was sponsor of the Senior class play "Nobody but Nancy" which was an outstanding success.

He was a very pleasant person, which made him easy to approach. He believed in commending the students who did well, thereby making them more self-confident. Some of these persons have grown into community leaders, which may be attributed to the fact they received a big boost from Mr. Patty when they were in high school.

Again in September of 1933 the principalship of Morehouse Parish Training School changed, Mr. A. H. Jackson was hired for the position.

It is interesting to note the strong ties between the community and school from its inception. Mr. Jackson was soon made aware of this linkage. A group of men, interested in the welfare of the school and community, organized themselves in what was known as the Civic Club. Emanuel Carter, who had been instrumental in initiating the organization, was the first president. This organization sponsored a Boy Scout Troop and elected Percy Jones to serve as Scout Master. The Civic Club made notable contributions to the school as well as to the commu-



Principal's Home



Elementary School

nity. Many students who attended Morehouse Parish Training School and Morehouse High School remember the drinking fountain located between the two frame buildings. Although the fountain has been destroyed, it was constructed and donated by the Civic Club. A punishment during the time of Principal Jackson meant performing some constructive task. For the boys who were punished, it meant, "Off to the woods." Each boy was asked to go into the woods, get a tree and plant it on the campus. Some of these trees still stand on the present campus today.

Twice during the administration of Principal Jackson, the elementary school building was ravaged by fire. The second time the building was destroyed, classes had to be held in the churches of the community. St. Mary C.M.E., St. John Missionary Baptist, and Second Baptist, opened their doors to provide space for classes to meet. Because of the limited space on campus, it was necessary to hold all forms of assembly at St. John Missionary Baptist Church.

The music teacher, Miss Willie C. Powe, assisted by Mrs. George Scott, presented vocal musicals each year. Many of the selections presented in the musicals were also rendered during the Commencement Exercises.

To encourage students from the elementary schools to attend Morehouse Parish Training School, Teacher-constructed tests were administered by the principal of the high school. Students who scored high on these tests were asked to enroll in the high school. The increase in the school's population and the need for more teachers, also a need for added space, presented new problems. Not having the funds nor the means of obtaining such a vast sum of money, nor the munificence of the Parish School Board, the girls' dormitory had to be discontinued. The building was immediately converted into classrooms to be used for classes in Home Economics.

Tests were also given to high school seniors. These tests were provided through the State Department of Education. As a result of these tests, based on the qualification of the teachers and the scores of the seniors, schools were rated. During the tenure of Principal Jackson, Morehouse Parish Training School ranked fourth in the State.

During the eleven years of service to the school and the community, Principal Jackson left an impressive record of dedication and involvement in the growth and progress of Morehouse Parish Training School. Leaving Bastrop in 1944, he assumed the principalship of McKinley High School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Mr. James Smith served as principal from 1944 to 1948. He was the only native of Morehouse Parish to serve in this capacity. A fire destroyed a portion of the Morehouse Parish Training School Plant. This disaster made it necessary for classes to be held in churches in the community which were relatively close to the school plant site. Some of these churches were St. Mary C.M.E., Ivory Chapel, St. John and Second Baptist. In spite of the fact that students and teachers were scattered, Mr. Smith used his expertise to coordinate the activities of the school. These circumstances did not cause any deterioration in the quality of education at Morehouse Parish Training School.

Two important changes occurred during Mr. Smith's administration. First, the requirements for graduation from high school were changed so that a student would have to complete twelve years of schooling rather than eleven. Secondly, the building of a new physical plant took place. This building was constructed to accommodate high school classes.

Mr. Smith faced this transitional period with dignity and pride. His outlook on life was wholesome in his efforts to stress competency, responsibility and reliability.

Henry V. Adams came to Morehouse in June of 1948 to serve as principal. His life work spanned many years in several places before coming to Bastrop. Having an adventurous nature he immediately set forth to broaden the extraclass activity program he had found at Morehouse, added new ones and provided some opportunities for all students and teachers to engage in an activity.

The seemingly untiring, Principal Adams, had some what of a contagious effect upon those who surrounded him. He was an energetic man who believed that the operation of a total school program meant a full-day, full-week job which included Saturday, afternoon, evenings, and sometimes Sunday as well.

Having inherited a very competent faculty, Principal Adams proceeded to find means of enhancing the curriculum and activity program further. Asking for a new teacher to be added to the faculty, adding a new subject to the curriculum and obtaining a desirable sponsor for an extraclass activity, all in one, was quite often the finesse used by Mr. Adams. In some instances he would secure the services of persons he knew or had known prior to coming to Bastrop, to help in the organizational structure of a new activity.

Mr. A. V. Turner, of Monroe, La. the first band director, came and found that several parents were willing to purchase instruments, the school had also purchased several of the larger instruments, and the students were eager. It was this combination of events that the Morehouse Parish Training School Band was organized.

Lucious Jefferson, whom Mr. Adams also asked to come to Bastrop, found many talented athletes and immediately took over the reins of the "round ball squad." Having been an athlete and a coach during his career, Principal Adams was not satisfied with just basketball and baseball. Just before the new session of 1950 began he went in search of another coach, intent upon the possibility of fielding a football team in September. Quite by accident or perhaps, one could say good fortune for William Washington, he was asked to come to Morehouse Parish Training School. Washington came as a physical education teacher (boys and girls), and to initiate the Morehouse Parish Training School Tiger Football Team, Jefferson served as the Assistant Coach.

With the growing population of the School and over crowded rooms and increased class loads for all teachers, problems became more apparent. The trend of specialization also brought about new teaching assignments and new extraclass sponsors. Music classes were added, the agriculture class was divided and the students were able to take industrial arts. A physical education teacher for girls was secured and several teachers of elementary education were added to help alleviate the crowded conditions in the primary and intermediate grades. Numerous clubs were re-organized. One of the most popular and outstanding was the Drama Club. Under the sponsorship of Mrs. Evelyn C. Moore Strickland and Alfred W. Twyman, the Drama Club was awarded numerous State Trophies, and the distinct honor of the "Best Actress Award," chosen from the hundreds of Thespians throughout the State, for two years.

With the continuously changing concepts of education and innovations in teaching, curriculum up-dating was constantly taking place. Typing, shorthand, business education, and French were soon to be added. With these additions and again, an increasing school population, some new facilities were constructed: a music annex, shop room, lunchroom and elementary school building.

Operational expenses grew as the school's enrollment increased, activities were expanded, clubs and organizational membership rosters rose, and entrance into wider areas of competition were made. This created some financial problems. But with enterprising endeavors, hard work, creative ideas, and the desire to be one of the elite Black schools of the State, these problems diminished. Principal Adams, the faculty, students and community all went to work and were able to conquer these seemingly insurmountable conditions.



High School Building — 1949



Auditorium — 1965

In the fall, the fund raising activity was Homecoming. There were "Hops in the Shop," candied apples, peppermint logs, trips to Dotsos Park, and the "Monday Movie." Homecoming was climaxed with Coronation, Parade and Homecoming game. In the Spring all classes worked hard for May Day. This was another great time for interschool competition. Each physical education class trying to perfect its assigned Folk Dance. The Home Economic Department helping to design the most authentic costumes to depict the country of the performers. The hundreds of blossoms with their sweet fragrance filling the air, brought to school by the students to form a bank across the May Queen's throne. And the May Pole, the excitement that one performer would get one ribbon in the wrong place and throw the other performers out-of-step.

The fifties were exciting and productive. During this period the most prestigious award given by the Louisiana Interscholastic Athletic and Literary Organization was retized by Morehouse High School. The J. W. Fisher Memorial Trophy, representing the over-all winner in both literary and athletic activities. The Trophy was designed to circulate annually on the State Level for all-around championship. A school winning the Trophy three years became the owner. In 1955, Principal Adams in a formal assembly received the Trophy for Morehouse High School.

In 1952 Grambling College chose Morehouse as one of its centers for off-campus Laboratory experiences in Teacher Training.

During the early sixties the over-all growth of the school made it almost impossible for one person to supervise and direct all areas. Mrs. Velma W. Adams, wife of Principal Adams, was named as the Assistant Principal. Under the leadership of Mr. and Mrs. Adams, advancements were still evident in the academic, as well as, the extraclass activities and in the procurement of needed facilities.

In June of 1964 the construction of two modern facilities were begun. Two, that both the school and community had looked forward to for quite sometime. The auditorium with a seating capacity of 1489, lobby, dressing rooms, central heating and air conditioning was constructed on the northwest corner of West Madison Avenue and Haggerty Street. The Stadium and Track were constructed on the southwest corner of the campus, bordering South Haggerty. The facilities were constructed through the generosity of the Morehouse Parish School Board and Superintendent, Mr. Ted Wright, at an approximate cost of \$318,000.

During the almost sixteen years of Principal Adams' tenure many persons were touched directly or indirectly by some facet of his personality. In February of 1965, Principal Adams passed, leaving an abounding legacy of courage, perseverance, service and dedication.

In 1965, after the demise of Principal Adams, William L. Washington was named his successor. Washington, who served as Head Coach during the time of the administration of Mr. Adams, also served as the Acting Principal through the latter months of the 1964-65 school session.

It was rather ironic that the very person Principal Adams had sought in earlier years to meet the football team was now placed in a similar position of helping to direct the way Morehouse High School would go.

Washington was not naive as to the pressures and work he was to encounter. Because of his exposure in earlier years at Broken Bow, Oklahoma where his uncle served at Dunbar High School and in Ferriday, Louisiana where his mother served as principal of Sevier High School, he had some first hand awareness of the involvement and importance, the responsibilities and dedication he needed to serve in this new position. Also, coupled with internal knowledge of the concerns, progress, and over-all prevailing environment of the school and his close and supportive work with Principal Adams, Washington embarked upon his position as principal.

He knew of the success that had always prevailed at Morehouse during his predecessors' years. He also knew the margin of excellence that Morehouse was experiencing with schools within its level and AAA Division of the State. As a result of this knowledge he set out to maintain these standards. Teachers were encouraged to increase their professional growth and proficiency. They were encouraged to further develop their skills and techniques of teaching; providing greater opportunities for them to aid in the development of the young people who had been entrusted to their care.

During these years, the student unrest and demonstrations on college campuses and in schools throughout the nation had its influence upon the students of Morehouse High School. Although the school was not experiencing any outward demonstrative rebellion, the atmosphere, tone, and mood of the school was undergoing some changes. But, with an Assistant Administrator, Mrs. Velma W. Adams, a faculty of dedicated teachers, who believed as he did, they fortified themselves against the turmoil and undesirable forces of the sixties.

Washington had the distinctive honor of presenting the first graduating class in the newly constructed auditorium. As had been done in years prior to his administration, Eighth Grade Commencement Exercises were held and the Elementary Department had their usually well directed Operettas.

The Auditorium, with its modern exterior and beautiful interior, was an asset to the community. On the first Baccalaureate Services held in the facility, many of the more than 1100 people in attendance, found the serenity far greater than any expectation. Some of the faculty members expressed their desire to place an organ and piano in the modern facility to further add to its already existing beauty. They immediately set in motion means of securing the funds necessary to purchase the two instruments. Again, the joint efforts of the faculty, students, and community were evident and the strains of the melody of the two instruments were heard through the Auditorium.

The school's population growth and the addition of new books, periodicals, and other materials led to the need of an added facility. It was also apparent at this time that a science laboratory was of almost importance. In 1966 a facility was constructed, designed as a classroom and science laboratory combination and library. The facility, although larger than the present space allotted, only partially fulfilled the great need the school was experiencing.

Several other improvements were made and new faces and names appeared on the faculty roster and on the campus. Some came for a few months; other for a year, and some remained through the dissolution. Some of the faces and names that had been all too familiar, passed off the scene through the inevitable route, death. Several desired to seek other fields of endeavor. Many progressed to the endearing luxury of retirement. Some members were appointed to other positions, as was the case of William Alexander, who assumed the principalship of H. V. Adams Elementary School. (An elementary school named in honor of the late Principal Henry V. Adams of Morehouse High School).

Although these faces and names had passed, each had shared in the glorious heritage of Morehouse High School, and had left indelible impressions. In retrospect, perhaps, the greatest determining factor or evidence of the heritage and progress that Morehouse High School made was the ever increasing number of students who graduated, the continuous professional growth of its faculty, and the success of its alumni who span the nation.