



PLOVER

P

INDIANS

1000CS PATH
HIGH SCHOOL

Local/Area

Daily World

Monday,
Nov. 4, 1985

Section B

The birth of a school

Plaisance beginning didn't come easy

By STEVE LEBLANC
Staff Writer

Public education. It's something taken for granted today by children and parents alike. But, it wasn't always that way. Margrette Gauthier of Washington especially appreciates how rare formal education once was; her grandfather, Felix Thierry — himself poorly educated — established the first approved public school for blacks in Plaisance.

Several years later, Mrs. Gauthier was one of the first graduates of the Plaisance school.

Today, at age 79, Mrs. Gauthier beams with pride at the integral role her grandfather played in establishing a school for blacks in Plaisance — at a time when no one else would.

"He (Thierry) was a poor man, but he was considered better off than most people in the Plaisance area," Mrs. Gauthier explained.

"He asked the superintendent of schools at the time if the state would provide a teacher if he (Thierry) built his own school on his own land."

A private school existed in Plaisance at the time, but the cost of attending the facility — 50 cents a month — was prohibitive to some.

"If a person had five children, paying the

fee, paying for the books, walking to school and eating a cold lunch, it was more than a person could afford."

In that light, Thierry's offer to build a public school was particularly timely.

"My mother answered the door when the superintendent brought the message back from Baton Rouge. The school was approved, but they had to see the location of the land. The school had to be bordered by a public road."

Property Thierry owned wasn't suitable for that purpose, so the facility was constructed on property, owned by Prevost Cretien, not far from the present Plaisance High School site.

While Thierry furnished construction materials, building the 50 foot by 38 foot schoolhouse was a community wide effort, Mrs. Gauthier said.

"Everybody was proud there was a school for black children.

It was given the name Thierry School. The facility was simple, Mrs. Gauthier said.

"It had one door in back, one in front. There was no ceiling, we could look up and see the shingles. There was one long desk in the middle of the room, with two benches, without backs, on each side."

The school had five grades.

Thierry died in 1914.

Two years later, after the Cretien family sold the land where the school stood, another acre of property was purchased.

It was there — the site of the present Plaisance High School — where the Thierry School was located.

There was considerable lobbying to change the name of the school.

Some wanted to name the school after the couple from whom the acre of land was purchased, Mrs. Gauthier said.

She still vividly remembers her own father's contribution to the debate.

"He was sitting with his legs crossed when he said, 'pappa gave the money and found the land for a school for the community. Why not call it the Plaisance School'?" It was.

When the school was enlarged in 1919, with a \$2,200 donation from Julius Rosenwald, its name became "Rosenwald School," Gauthier said.

On April 21, 1922, Mrs. Gauthier (then-



Submitted Photo

FELIX THIERRY
Plaisance School founder

Margrette Thierry) graduated from the school, which by then had seven grades.

"I kept my card," she said. Sure enough, Mrs. Gauthier's certificate of graduation is part of her personal papers. She still treasures her grandfather's pioneering role in public education.

"He worked hard for that. He couldn't read. He just figured," Mrs. Gauthier said, "we had to have education.

"It wasn't much of a building, but he did make a start."



Felix Thierry