

THROUGH THE YEARS

AFRICAN - AMERICAN HISTORY IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

SPRING/SUMMER 1999

Maudie Edwards, The Teacher: My Story



Maudie Edwards, standing far right, with her class at Ullin, IL, 1953-54

By Maudie Edwards

I was born in Pulaski, a small village in Southern Illinois. There I attended elementary school from the first through the eighth grades in a small, all Negro two room school house. I was bussed ten miles to the Douglass High School, in Mounds, and after graduation, enrolled in the Southern Illinois Teacher's College (now called Southern Illinois University) at Carbondale. At the completion of two years, I was awarded a Teacher's Certificate and began my teaching career in small country schools in the villages of Olmstead, Mounds City and Ullin, Illinois. Meanwhile, I attended summer school and night classes at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, until I completed my Bachelor's and Master's Degrees. Also during the summers, I attended night classes at Wayne University in Detroit, Michigan, and two summers at the University of Denver. I was still teaching in Ullin, Illinois at the time the

desegregation of schools was pending and decided it was time to move on, so I came to Champaign, Illinois in 1959 and was hired as a first grade teacher at the Booker T. Washington Elementary School working with children who needed special help.

Four years later, Project Promise came into being, which involved children with high potential, but who were working below average. The classes were made up of children, both Negro and White, selected from most of the elementary schools in Unit 4. I spent four years with that program.

After Project Promise I was asked to return to work with the Lab School at the Booker T. Washington Elementary School. This program was under the supervision of the University of Illinois College of Education, Department of Elementary Education with emphasis on math and science.

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Champaign-Urbana Education Firsts

By Doris Hoskins

On August 3, 1934, the *News-Gazette* reported that Miss Mae R. Hawkins was to be the first Colored teacher hired in the Champaign public school system. Miss Hawkins was employed to teach at Lawhead School at a salary of \$90 per month and she would be teaching Colored pupils exclusively. Miss Hawkins graduated from Illinois State Normal University and attended the National Kindergarten School of Evanston. She did her practice teaching at Normal and Decatur.

In 1956, Taylor Thomas was the first Black teacher and later administrator employed in the Urbana school system. He taught history and sociology in the junior and senior high schools and the students dedicated their yearbook to him in 1961. Thomas was named Assistant Principal of Urbana High School in 1968, and four years later became Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, a position he held until his retirement in 1977.

Thomas was the first in his younger years as well; he was the only Black student at Columbia School in Champaign when he entered the first grade. He continued

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Reaching Out To Teach Our Children

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is a source of true art and science.

Albert Einstein

By Barbara Gillespie-Washington

Being a science educator, I love the mysteriousness of science. For some years I've desired to make some valuable contribution to my community. With great interest in scientific study, I thought this could be an avenue to teach and share with the Black children I love so dearly, and hopefully make a difference.

Science is not the preferred subject of choice among our Black children. I have taught many summer science classes in the Urbana School District. Many times there were no Black children in my classes. In time, the number of Blacks increased slightly. This concerned me. I discussed this with some of the children. Listening to their experiences, I could better understand why they shied away from a subject that could prove to be academically lethal, complex and overpowering. "Read the book, regurgitate the facts" This was the expressed method of science instruction for so many. Science should be so much more.

In my studies, top authorities in child psychology and learning, had much to say about how children learn best. Piaget's work emphasized the idea that children need concrete hands-on experiences. Bruner also taught that concrete experiences should be heavily emphasized in childhood learning. Efforts such as Project 2061 and the National Science Education Standard call for a major reformation of science educa-



Barbara Gillespie-Washington

tion in America. That reformation moves text book orientation to more hands-on activity based instruction.

As a science educator, I strive to facilitate science experiences using a hands-on approach that sparks children's interest. For the past seven years, Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club has been the major site for sharing my science teaching skills in the community. My approach is to involve children in science that capitalizes on expressions of wonder to encourage learning.

Each summer, I coordinate and teach an intense six week science camp. The program is supported by Project S.E.A.R.C.H., University of Illinois. This past summer, Covenant Medical Center provided additional support. During this science camp, children are involved in hands-on, minds-on experiences that draw profound reactions of pleasure, powerfully encouraging science learning and language development. Children are anxious to be involved. I also serve as a Board Member of the Orpheum Children's Science Museum and volunteer in providing science experiences for children there. Just a few weeks ago while on duty, I had the privilege of interacting with some of the children from Bethel A.M.E. Church Sunday School and their very

fine leaders and teachers. It was quite exhilarating to observe them and listen to their exchange of observations. I was thrilled they chose to come and explore.

It's a joy to involve children in meaningful concrete experiences to enrich their background, and provide new understanding. Children are scientists at play. They develop their ideas about the world based on experiences with real things. May some of these shared experiences provide inspiration enough to encourage more young Black boys and girls to pursue careers in the intriguing world of science.



MAUDIE

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Teaching first grade was for me, the greatest enjoyment and I learned to develop many ways to teach, for to me each child was important. Listen to the child, look for something he or she can do well and try not to put them in an embarrassing situation so that they enjoy coming to school. In addition, planning extracurricular activities, i.e. art, drama with participation of each child in writing plays and/or acting, story telling and field trips, all of which helped to spark his or her imagination and allow him or her to freely express themselves, thus inspiring them to want to learn.

Following my tenure at the Booker T. Washington Elementary School, I was transferred to Robeson Elementary School to teach first grade where I remained until my retirement in 1985.

After retirement, and because of my love for children and teaching, I began tutoring at the Douglass Annex and later moved to the Douglass Branch Library and the Stratton Elementary School.

EDUCATION FIRSTS

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his education at Gregory School through the seventh grade, attended the old Champaign High School for eighth grade, and entered high school in what is now Edison Junior High School. He earned his Bachelor's Degree from Tennessee State Teachers College, studied in the extension programs of Indiana State and Illinois State Normal Universities, and received his Master's Degree and an Advanced Certificate in Educational Administration from the University of Illinois.

See the special insert on African-American educators in the Champaign County public school system. We realize this is not a complete listing. Please contact us with any additions or changes. Thank you.



Taylor Thomas



Mae Hawkins

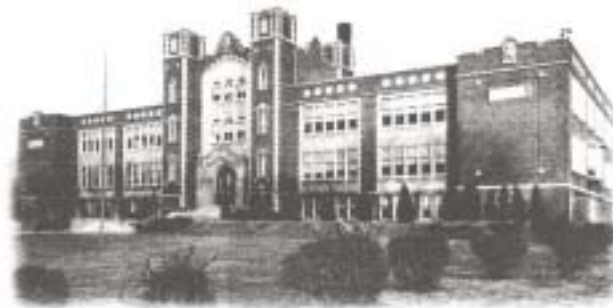


Lawhead School



Willard School

Attendance at these two schools became predominantly black over the years.



Urbana High School, opened 1915

Through the years collections of papers, photographs, documents of individuals, families and organizations of the African American community have been discarded or lost because there were no local programs to seek out and preserve such materials. Recognizing this fact, the Champaign County African American History Committee, a volunteer committee under the sponsorship of the Early American Museum and the Champaign Park District, was organized in 1992. The mission of this committee is to work with local individuals and organizations from Champaign County and the surrounding area to help organize and preserve historical records dealing with the African American experience in Champaign County.

Through the Years is a biannual newsletter featuring individuals, families, community groups and institutions. Join us in preserving this heritage and keeping African American history alive all year. If you are interested in receiving this newsletter, joining the Committee, loaning materials or sharing information, please call the Early American Museum at 217/586-2612.

Visit our website at: <http://www.prairienet.org/years>

The Champaign County African American History Committee gratefully acknowledges both the Champaign-Urbana Convention & Visitors Bureau and National City Bank for sponsoring the printing of Through the Years.



Please help us spread the word! Feel free to xerox this newsletter and share it with your friends.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATORS THROUGH THE YEARS IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

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Gloria Avant
Bruce Allen

B Sandra Banks
James Barnes
Della Beck
Karen Lee Beckrum
Carolyn Blackwell
Cynthia Blakely
Yavonnda Blanden
Melissa Bolden
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Murial Bondurant
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Beverly Coleman
Bernadine Conner
Lucille Covington
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JoAnn Crosky

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U.S. Davidson *
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Lizzie Davis (Johnson) *
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Rita Disroe
Gloria Dixon
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Jessie Donaldson
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Gladys Downing
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Bennie Drake, Jr.
Charles Drake
Sharon Dunlap

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Ruthie Edwards
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Crystal El Jamal
Angela English
Ollie Evans

F Brenda Foster
Maxine Foster
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Ludella Harris
James Hayes, Jr.
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