

Colbert/Rosenwald School & Museum

The following page(s) and image(s) are excerpts from websites, newspaper articles, and museum brochures.

“After integration of black and white students in the late 1960s, the Colbert school was expanded to serve all of Dayton ISD’s fifth and sixth graders. As Dayton’s school population increased, other schools were built, with Colbert eventually becoming the preschool location.

Some of its buildings fell into disuse and part of it was demolished in 2010. The original Rosenwald School was restored at that time and is today a museum dedicated to the school’s history as well as that of the African American community.

Opened to the public in February 2011, the Rosenwald School, used by African-American students in Dayton from 1927 – 1967 until schools were officially desegregated, has been completely restored to its original design and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The museum holds artifacts and memorabilia from the time period that the school was used. Saving the historic building has been a priority for Dayton ISD and the Colbert Alumni Association, with a combination of public and private efforts.

Texas had a total of 518 school buildings funded by the Rosenwald Foundation -- 22 of them in Houston County -- providing classrooms for thousands.”

Colbert Elementary Website - History

<http://col.daytonisd.net/19604>

Mrs. Annie Colbert was hired by the school board and became the first black teacher of record in the Dayton public school system. Her tenure began sometimes in the 1890's and lasted until near the beginning of World War I.

Miss Annie Fairchild attended public school in Houston, and then went on to attend Tillotson Institute in Austin to further her education. She began teaching in Houston at the Gregory School.

At that time, there were nineteen black teachers in Houston. She later married Mr. Tony Colbert, a railroad porter, at which time she was forbidden to teach school in Houston being a married woman. Shortly after that, she moved to Dayton to continue her teaching career.

Here in Dayton, she was assigned to a one-room shack. Almost immediately, she and her students took on the job of building a school thirty feet wide and forty feet long. She took pride in the fact that the building even had a stage. The school was situated in the vicinity of present day Luke Street and Prater.

Mrs. Colbert was known for her strict and demanding performance, but she always took a personal interest in the children even to the extent of adopting a young, motherless girl, Willie Speights (aka Willie B. Smith). She boasted of one of her students Aaron Day, Jr. who was commissioned a captain in World War I. Mr. Day later became vice president of an insurance company based in North Carolina. Mrs. Colbert's favorite saying was "Tis better to engrave your name in the hearts of people than to have it carved on cold stone". After her husband died, Mrs. Colbert returned to Houston and eventually went to teach in Virginia.

Dayton grew and school enrollment increased. The school site was moved to Beauty Street. The teaching staff was increased to three, and with the arrival of the sawmill, the box factory, and the migration of Creoles from Louisiana, enrollment continued to increase. After World War I, the school was moved once more, this time to the Cleveland Road, site of the present day Anson Rigby Memorial Rodeo Arena.

The facility consisted of a three-room frame building with a stage and folding doors that opened into an auditorium. The enrollment was approximately 100, but the regular attendance was about sixty. Weather, distance, family needs, apathy,

and parental attitude about the need for education were factors governing attendance. Other schools were opened in the outlying communities of Eastgate, Five Mile Settlement, and Stilson to accommodate the children of sharecroppers.

Around 1927, a four-room brick building became the Dayton Black School, with the old frame structure becoming the home economics and NFA (National Farmers of America) shop. When the school at Five Mile Settlement closed, its teacher joined the staff in Dayton and its children were bussed to town in a Model "T" truck with a homemade cover. Sometime after 1931, the school burned and arson was rumored to be the cause. By 1933, a new school was completed and ready for occupancy. It was another four-room brick structure with folding doors to provide space for assemblies.

The name Colbert was chosen for the new school as a result of petitioning by the black community. Although Colbert school was not dedicated until the 1934-35 school year, the first class graduated in May 1934. Mrs. Colbert was present for the dedication and talked about her experiences in education.

Mrs. Annie Fairchild Colbert died in June 1961 at the age of 95. She successfully paved the way for many people in Dayton with an unrelenting spirit, one that neither time nor adverse conditions could ever cool...one that has lived in the hearts of countless people long after she has been gone. Honoring her father and mother, she was a woman who had foresight, courage, and the unparalleled energy that comes from proven character. She not only walked by faith, but possessed a strong faith in the promise of public education for all people. She personified the promises that education can bring to a community by inspiring past, present and future generations of educators and students alike...instilling in them a burning desire for self-improvement and enlightenment.

The spirit of Mrs. Annie Colbert will forever reside in Dayton. And the school that bears her name remains as a monument to the lasting profound impact one dedicated teacher can have.

- Wall of Honor Inductee 2001

February 16, 2011 Vindicator

Dayton History: Grand Opening , Tomorrow, February 18

http://www.thevindicator.com/history/article_fb6d32de-3a46-11e0-a11e-001cc4c002e0.html

“The Dayton Colbert Elementary Campus-Rosenwald School Grand Opening will be this Friday, Feb. 18, at 10:30 am. There will be a ceremony, tour, and Colbert Alumni Association members will display artifacts and photos in the school.

Dayton ISD Assistant Superintendent Doug Coleman added, "The building has been completely redone back to its original design, as close as we could, to get it listed on the National Register of Historical Places." Saving the historic black school of Dayton, a priority for Dayton ISD and the Colbert Alumni Association, was a combination of public and private efforts.

Members of the alumni association that were active in the restoration and preservation efforts were Lilly Stephenson, "Virgin" Channie M. Payne Edwards, Lois Pruitt, Juanita Harvey, June Jackson, Myrtle Freeman, Edward Foster, Fried Guidry and Jo Ann Paul.

In addition to touring the historic school building, the public is invited to explore the Outdoor Learning Center at the Rosenwald School that was carried out by Eagle Scout Jon-Luke Lambright of Boy Scout Troop No. 8. A Dayton High School Senior, Lambright completed this center for his Eagle Scout Project last October.

The school is located at 231 S. Colbert Street in East Dayton. For further information contact Jo Ann Paul at 936-402-3560. Donations, financial or historical, are welcomed.

A History of the Black Schools of Dayton, 1865-1967

After the end of the Civil War in 1865, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands organized schools for the black citizens and assisted with other legal questions of the day such as labor contracts and voting. George Davis, officed in Livingston, was the Freedmen's Bureau Director for Liberty and Polk Counties.

By 1871 the state had organized a common school system with the county judge acting as county school superintendent. Due to the world economic depressions, progress was slow on all fronts.

By 1883 Liberty County maintained thirty-four schools for 357 white students and nineteen schools for 396 black students. The average school term was three months for ages 8-14.

The black schools for the county were: Ames, East San Jacinto at Cleveland, Jones, Inside Prairie School at Walter, Miriam, Fuqua and Clarke, Milvid, Young, Nonie, Turkey Creek, Mt. Zion, Moss Bluff, Clayton Bottom, Riverside, Little Peach, Rayburn, Robinson, Woodson, Big Hill, Sahara at Devers, Shiloh, Lamb, Lakeland, Golden Spray, Lone Star, and Little Flock.

The only early black high school was Green Hill or Greenville located outside of Dayton near Stilson and Fouts. The black schools were located on the outskirts of a town in order to serve not only the city population, but also the adjacent rural area.

Dayton teachers of this era were Andrew Jackson, Margaret Ayers, and Annie Colbert, the namesake for the Colbert campus.

Miss Annie Fairchild Colbert may have been the first black teacher in Dayton. In the 1890s she arrived from Houston to teach in a one-room school, a twelve hundred square foot wooden building with a stage, located near Luke and Prater Streets. She continued teaching until approximately 1918.

In 1907 Dayton had enough population for an independent school district, independent of the county common school system. By a vote of seventeen to eight, citizens created the district on July 20. This included limited school opportunities for the black students but the district was rather small since it only employed a total of five teachers in 1910.

The black school population continued to increase, more teachers were hired and a new school was constructed on Beauty Street. It is not known if the old school was moved or a new building was built.

By 1918 the school was relocated to a site near the African Methodist Episcopal Church on the Cleveland Road, the present site of the rodeo arena. The three-room frame building had a stage and folding doors to create auditorium space for general assemblies.

In 1927 the nearby common schools of Dugat, Five Mile School, Greenville, Linwood, Myrtle Ridge, Simmons Bottom, and Wolf Island, better known as the Wolf Island/Crosby Eastgate Road School, consolidated with Dayton ISD. The total student body was 953.

About 1927 due to increased student population and economical prosperity, Dayton ISD constructed a four-room brick building. The old wooden building became the home economics and National Negro Farmers of America shop facilities.

The Cleveland Road brick schoolhouse served until it burned, reportedly in 1929.

Emily Wycliff, a 1941 graduate of Colbert High School recalled that their school was burned and the black students had to relocate to the Colbert site on the far east side. As she stated many years latter: "I felt betrayed, our school was gone from a nice, highly desirable location and the lot ended up being a rodeo arena for the whites." Wycliff was not certain, but often wondered if racism had anything to do with it.

According to various published accounts, there is a discrepancy for the date of the Colbert-Rosenwald School construction. According to the Dayton ISD published history, Colbert was built in the following phases: #2 middle building, 1929; #1 main building in 1950; #3 building, 1960; campus totally renovated, 1987; Colbert-Rosenwald School Building restored in 2011. Workers found a notation in the Rosenwald School for a date of 1931.

The football field and gymnasium were added in the 1950s in an attempt to make the campus more equal.

Mrs. Mable Banks was a teacher in 1931. The new Colbert School that housed all grades was described as a four-room brick structure in 1933.

The Colbert School was not dedicated until the school year 1934-1935. Annie Colbert returned to Dayton from Virginia to attend the dedication and reminisced of her teaching in Dayton. Ms. Annie Colbert died at the age of ninety-five in June 1961, a true pioneer of black education in Southeast Texas.

In 1931 the roster of the football team read: "Pie" Alexander, Murphy Brandley, Alfred Dever, Walter Fontenot, LaVan Foster, Austin "Bedo" Myers, Oscar "Two Sweet" Myers, D. B. Prater, C. F. Pete Roberts, Luke St. Julian, and Joseph Tousant. Colbert High School Principal T. W. Humphrey coached them.

The 1935 graduating class members were Clarence Simmons, Eunice Mae Trahan, Henry Williams and Wilbert Wycliff, husband of Emily Wycliff.

Colbert School Principals that followed Mrs. Colbert were R. S. Austin, W. Fields, T. W. Humphrey, Richard Jefferson, L. J. Mann, John Marion, C. W. Simmons, B. W. Turner, and Charles Tyson.

In 1956-1957, the Dayton Colbert High School girl's basketball team was district 8-A champions. Coached by Lois Pruitt, the players were Myrtle Devers, Myrna Dugat, Juanita Ligons, Eleanor Paul, and Margarret St. Julian.

In 1962 the Dayton Tigers football team were Texas State Runner-Ups. The players were Oscar Grays, James Hubert, Willie Kelly, Vermer Bradford, Joseph Caesar, Doyle Payne, Raymond St. Julian, James Grays, John Henry Thomas, Glenn Brown, Henry Ford, Sam Brown, C. Baldwin, Oscar Shaw, Samuel Bradford, Michael Collette, Henry Fred Hyson, Lloyd Williams, Jessie Roberts, David Baldwin, Charles Collette, Rufus Lewis, Daren Williams, Heron Payne, and Garfield Godfrey.

On the 1962 team, Quarterback Garfield Godfrey, Right Halfback Heron Payne, Left Halfback Daren Williams and Fullback Rufus Lewis were known as "The Four Horsemen." Duriel L. Harris was the head coach and John Collette was the assistant coach.

After the Fifth Circuit Court Judges in New Orleans issued a summer ruling "that ordered all public schools in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas must be desegregated at the start of this school year." the Dayton ISD finally decided to integrate their schools, twelve years after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling that ended separate-but-equal public schools.

On Aug. 17, 1967, the school board announced that Dayton High School and Colbert High School would be combined along with all ninth grades in the white high school. This resulted in the addition of five new classrooms to the building.

Fredda Nottingham, Dayton Jr. High Principal, reported that by combining all of the classes would result in a Jr. High student population of 320 in September, but anticipated no problems in meeting the challenge.

The year 1967-1968 was the first year that black students graduated in the same senior class as whites. The pioneers whose photos were included in the May 1968 class photo published in the Vindicator's graduation special section were Donald Baldwin, Sarah F. Como, Cynthia Gail Dugat, Rufus Dugat, Erma Julia Dever, Malinda Grays, Henderson Hamitt, Edgar Hubert, Sharon Thompson, Karen Bea Tousant, Cal Varner and Marilyn Jane Zeno. The class of 1969 included Anthony Dearbonne and Lois Elliott. They were a part of our history and served their community well.

Their ancestors, the names of Como, Dugat, Ever, Grays, Hamitt, Hubert and Varner all well known Dayton families from before the Civil War, had paved the way for black education and equal facilities.

Be a part of history by attending the dedication of the Colbert-Rosenwald School this Friday morning.

For further information on the History of Dayton ISD, read History: The Early Years of Dayton Schools, Colbert School, Common School Districts published in 2001 by the Dayton ISD. Wilbert and Emily Wycliff of Dayton compiled the majority of the black school history. In addition to this book, this article is based on information from the Liberty County School Records, the Liberty County Black History Files, Leona Briggs Carter Collection, the Wilbert & Emily Wycliff Archives, and the Vindicator Archives located at the Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center.”

June 30, 2012 – Houston Chronicle

Historic Rosenwald school a Dayton Museum

<http://www.chron.com/neighborhood/dayton/news/article/Historic-Rosenwald-school-a-Dayton-museum-9416633.php>

“A white picket fence surrounds the front yard of a brick building nestled between the gymnasium and the main building of Colbert Elementary School in Dayton.

Once upon a time, it was the Annie Colbert School that from the 1927 until 1967 taught segregated African-American students in all grades, one of 5,300 U.S. schools forged by a historic early 20th century pact.

Today the structure is the Colbert Rosenwald Museum, which is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the first and third Saturdays of the month.

Alumni will meet at the museum, probably will remember where they used to sit and will reminisce about their teachers and friends, for the Colbert School Reunion, which will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, July 28.

The building and the memorabilia it houses — including photographs, trophies, citations, ribbons and report cards — reflect a proud sense of multi-generational scholarship. Students knew division but not, in an intellectual context, a sense of defeat. Rudiments of achievement validate that fact.

It is not a long lesson to learn; nevertheless it is a lesson that leaves much on which to reflect, particularly for the youth of a digital and de jure desegregated world.

“The message to young people is that this is the way life was back at this time,” Class of 1954 graduate JoAnn Paul said. “These are some of the things that we acquired through hard work and hard effort.”

Achievement never gets old. Hence, the museum is a treasure in Dayton’s back yard that anyone may appreciate.

“It is for the community,” Class of 1966 graduate Brenda Trahan said, “to let them know what a rich treasure we have, right there.

“I went there all 12 years. We were not aware until recently that it was a Rosenwald school.”

Dayton Independent School District then-Superintendent Greg Hayman helped to save the building from the wrecking ball, thus setting the stage for its renovation,

three years ago, after he and Paul discovered that it was indeed a Rosenwald school.

The Rosenwald schools sprang from a 1912 partnership between Alabama-based Tuskegee Institute founder Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald, at the time president of Sears, Roebuck & Company. They wanted to improve the quality of education for African Americans. Rosenwald established a foundation, the funds of which paid for the construction of schools, places for teachers to live and industrial shops.

Several museum supporters visited Tuskegee June 14-16 for the first ever National Rosenwald Schools Conference. Presented by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the conference marked 100 years since the partnership was born that started a movement which propelled generations.

Descendants of Washington and Rosenwald were there.

Visitors also toured civil rights landmarks such as the route of the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march.”