Early Beginnings

Maureen Thomas

Follow this and additional works at: https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly

Part of the Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons, and the History Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by LOUIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Historic Huntsville Quarterly by an authorized editor of LOUIS.
Early Beginnings

By Maureen Thomas

In the beginning, in the very beginning in 1895, three pioneers, G. A. Irwin, O. A. Olsen and H. Lindsay were their names and they came South to Alabama traveling on a train. They came South with authorization from the General Conference and $8,000 in hand to buy land to be used as an industrial, normal, and theological school for the 'Negro' race.

On the train down South they stopped, they stopped in Tennessee at Chattanooga by L. Dyo Chamber's place and they saw Anna Knight's face. The face of the girl who became a great educator for the colored people and Oakwood's building bears her name.

So down South they came by train and five miles outside of Huntsville they found Mr. Irwin's farm; 380 acres full of brush and briar, and a lean-to barn. There was a dilapidated old mansion and a chocked-up well with 17 feet of debris, and 9 slave huts with 65 oak trees forming the main campus plot, and they bought it for $18 an acre on the spot.

To the farm they came from the North, from Battle Creek in Michigan and they found Washington Warsaw, a man born on the land; and they found J. J. Mitchell and Grant Atkins to keep it spic-n-span. Two students helped them too, George Graham and Grant Royston from Birmingham and Vicksburg. They came six months before to help until Salon M. Jacobs from Iowa, the principal, could come.

And principal Jacobs came down South to Huntsville and added to the Old Mansion a room; a room 18 x 24 feet which was used as a kitchen and a place to eat. He added a two-story building for classrooms and a boy's dorm; and all this Jacobs did to help the place transform.
So on November 16, 1896 Oakwood Industrial School down South opened up its doors, and H. S. Shaw, A. F. Hughes, Hattie Andre and S. M. Jacobs were the faculty four. They worked on developing the head, the heart and the hand according to the S.D.A. philosophy of education and God's great master plan.

And so 16 students came down South to get an education at Oakwood Industrial School in 1896. Eight colored boys—Frank Bruce, George Graham, Charles Morford, Robert Hancock, Thomas Murphy, Harry Pollard, Grant Royston and Samuel J. Thompson. The colored girls were Ella Grimes, Etta Little-John, Mary McBee, Nannie McNeal, Mary Morford, Daisy Pollard, Lela Thompson and Frances Worthington. They all came South to the colored school and settled down—what a phenomenon!

Old Mansion