

History of Education for Black People in Asheville

Part 1

Seventeen years before the start of public schools in Asheville, several Christian churches began a major movement to educate the city's black community.

The effort to educate black people here began in 1870 and was led by a Ms. A.C. Chapman, who moved to Asheville from Rochester, N.Y. She set-up classes in Trinity Episcopal Church.

Three additional church-sponsored schools were established in the mid to late 1800s. They included St. Matthais Episcopal Church and Calvary Presbyterian and one founded by Mr. and Mrs. L.M. Pease, formerly of New York City.

In 1875, the Peases noticed the absence of educational facilities for Asheville's black community and decided to do something about it. They purchased land on College Street just west of Beaucatcher Mountain and converted an old livery stable that was left on the property into a home and private school for black children, paying all of the expenses themselves. But due to failing health, the Peases were unable to continue their plans so they gave the property to the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

And on Oct. 31, 1887, the school was reopened under the leadership of the Rev. N.S. Albright and Mrs. Alsie B. Dole.

The first grade contained three generations of one family and more than 20 married couples.

Meanwhile, the Woman's Home Missionary Society conceived the idea of a home where girls could learn to be good homemakers. The idea caught the attention of Mrs. Marriage Allen of England who was touring the South and decided to visit the school. She was impressed by the work that she offered to give the society \$1,000 if they would build the home at once.

And on Feb. 9, 1897, the home was built and named Allen Home School in honor of Mrs. Allen.

In 1924, Allen became a four-year high school with accreditation from the State of North Carolina and in 1941, the named was officially changed to Allen High School.

Although emphasis were placed on the enrollment of girls at Allen, boys continued to attend the school until 1941.

Through the years, Allen High provided a sound education for thousands of young women not only across Western North Carolina, but from town and cities across the state. One of its more notable graduates was the late internationally known singer, songwriter and author the late Nina Simone, formerly of Tryon, N.C.

The Public School System

Part II

Black business leader Issac Dickson cast the deciding vote in 1887 at a meeting of the Asheville School Committee to bring the public school system to Asheville. The committee also agreed to operate under the official name of “The Asheville City Schools.”

On Jan. 16, 1888, the board authorized the repair of an abandoned building on S. Beaumont Street which led to the opening of Asheville’s first public school for black students.

George Henry Stephens, a native of the West Indies, was named principal. The three- teacher faculty included E.H. Lipscombe, D.C. Tuggs, and Harrison Brown. They were paid \$25 a month.