

**African Americans in Columbus City Schools
A Historical Perspective**

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History teaches us that freed African Americans equated education with freedom. After emancipation, freed African Americans knew that formal learning was the key to their success. States in the north addressed education for blacks in one of three ways: (1) states provided separate “colored” schools or (2) states provided “mixed” schools or (3) states did not include African-American children in the public school law at all. During this time period, separate schools were usually staffed by African Americans. The “mixed” schools however, were often staffed by European Americans.¹ In Ohio, educational law either excluded blacks or provided for their separate education until late in the 19th century.

In an effort to limit the number of blacks coming to the State of Ohio, in 1804, Black Laws were enacted with the purpose of hindering the social, economic, political and educational progress of free Africans. The laws required the following of free Africans:

(1) Required that Africans wishing to enter the State of Ohio, hold a certificate of freedom; (2) Required that all adult blacks and their children be registered at a cost of 12.5 cents per name (3) Made it a penal offense for anyone employing a black person who lacked a certificate of freedom; (4) made it a penal offense for anyone to harbor a fugitive slave.²

In 1807, the Ohio Legislature strengthened these Black Laws. The new provisions required that (1) African people post a good behavior bond of \$500 dollars by two bondsmen, (2) that African people could not testify against a white person in court

and (3) that the penalty assessed for harboring or concealing a fugitive slave was increased.³

While the Black Laws did not deal directly with education, they did create the atmosphere for the exclusion of Africans at any level in the educational system that was provided to European-American citizens. As they related to education, Black Laws lasted until 1887 when the legislature of the State of Ohio finally repealed the separate school laws.

In 1829, the Ohio Legislature had excluded all black youth from participation in the public school systems in Ohio. While black students were excluded from participation in the public education system in Ohio, African American parents did not wait for whites to provide for their educational needs. They were serious about their children receiving an education. During this time, Black citizens of Columbus, Ohio built schools without any financial support from the city of Columbus or the State of Ohio to educate their children. While the law of 1829 excluded black youth from participating in public education, it did provide language requiring that any taxes collected for education from black residents be returned to the black tax-payers or be maintained in a fund established specifically for the education of black youth.⁴ By 1831, blacks in Columbus, Ohio had created and were maintaining separate schools for black youth.

During this period, Blacks founded two kinds of schools: (1) private secular schools and (2) private church schools. The first school, which was established in 1831, was located on the city's south side where most African Americans of the city lived. In 1839, The Columbusians School Fund Association opened a new school for African

Americans. The cost for tuition was \$3 per pupil. Black students attended this school for a 6-month term.⁵

In 1841, the Columbusians School Fund Association contracted with Alfred Kelley and John L. Gill to erect a school building on the corners of Oak and Fifth Streets in Columbus, Ohio, the first school building for colored children.⁶ These schools for colored children however, were funded through subscription and therefore, only those who could afford to attend, did so.

In 1849, a new law in Ohio that still maintained segregated learning established a funding mechanism for black schools and permitted African American tax payers to elect school directors for their colored schools. The Black community of Columbus welcomed the 1849 law which provided a funding source for black schools and provided for members of the black community to control their own schools.

The City of Columbus organized Columbus City Schools in 1845. In 1847, the Columbus Board of Education hired its first African American teacher, John Geddes.⁷ As a result of the 1849 Ohio Law which established a system of taxation for public black schools, the Columbus Board of Directors called a meeting of black taxpayers and informed them that the City of Columbus was going to form one school district for colored persons. The first African American School was opened in Columbus City Schools in 1853 at a private residence. In 1853, the school state law of Ohio required the establishment of separate black schools by district.⁸ Until this time, Black citizens of Columbus maintained the schools for black children until they were placed into separate public schools.

The Columbus City School Board maintained separate schools for blacks and whites. By 1855, four black separate schools existed. Two of the schools were located on Gay Street, one on High Street and the other on Town Street.⁹ All four schools were staffed by African American teachers. After the Columbus Board of Education gained control of black schools and the funding that went along with them, it failed to provide adequate facilities and educational resources for black children.

In 1871, a building located at the corner of Third and Long Streets, which was originally built for white students in 1847, was opened for black children by Columbus Public Schools. This school was named the Loving School. Mr. James S. Waring became the first principal of Loving School. The school was named after school board member, Starling Loving, who had always fought for the equal rights for Blacks in Columbus. Dr. Loving also represented what was then the Eighth Ward of Columbus, which consisted primarily of African American residents. All black students who resided in the City of Columbus were required to attend the Loving school. If Black students lived outside of the Eighth Ward, they were required to walk to school. This mandate presented issues to students who did not live in the Eighth Ward or even on the east side of town. One of the main obstacles was that of transportation which deterred students who lived in other parts of the city from attending school on a regular basis. In addition, the Loving School could only accommodate 246 students at any one time which represented only 50 percent of students who were eligible to attend school at the time.

In 1874, Columbus Public Schools admitted the first black students into high school. While the Loving school was a segregated primary school in a semi-integrated school district, the high schools in Columbus were integrated. This integration was

tolerated by Columbus society because few colored children were able to stay in school long enough to reach high school. The only colored students who were fortunate to reach high school status were members of the black elite of Columbus and those were few in number.

During the 1875-86 school year, Columbus Public Schools opened the Normal School. The Normal School was created to train more teachers who were graduates of Columbus City Schools. The intent of the Board of Education at the time of opening the Normal School was to “grow their own”. In order to be admitted to the Normal School, applicants had to be prepared to do high school work and be at least 16 years of age. The Normal School was an integrated school as was the high school.

In 1877, Everett J. Waring was one of the first black graduates of the Normal School.¹⁰

In 1879, the Columbus Board of Education began to allow black children to attend other schools besides Loving after the Black parents of those children who lived long distances from the Loving School threatened the Board of Education with litigation.¹¹

In 1882, the Loving School was sold and demolished. In the fall of the same year, black children were allowed into Columbus’ predominately white schools. Several factors led to the closing of the city’s first “Colored School: (1) a protest by the black population of Columbus for an end to segregated schools; (2) the financial strain of trying to maintain a dual-school system; and (3) the poor condition of the building and neighborhood that the Loving School was located in.¹²

From 1882 to 1909, mixed schools in Columbus City Schools were dominant however, they did not employ African American teachers as the “Colored” schools once did.

In 1884, the Reverend James Poindexter, became the first African American school board member of Columbus Public Schools.¹³

In 1893, the Ohio General Assembly passed the Compulsory Education law which resulted in an increase in student enrollment in the Columbus City Schools for both black and white races. The enactment of this law resulted in school overcrowding in Columbus Public Schools. To ease the overcrowding of the schools, officials of the Columbus Public Schools resolved in June, 1900 to reinstitute a dual system of education through gerrymandering. Champion Avenue School, which still exists today was a result of this gerrymandering effort. Upon its opening in 1909, it touted an all black staff and student body.

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Supplemental Learning Activities

Introduction

The learning activities in this module are designed to enhance your understanding of the struggle of African Americans in Columbus, Ohio for educational opportunities from the early 1800's to 1910.

Objectives:

1. To develop an understanding of the history of African Americans and the educational system in Columbus, Ohio from 1800 – 1920.
2. To develop a timeline of the African American educational experience in Columbus, Ohio from 1800- 1920.
3. Show knowledge on a quiz regarding the African American educational experience in Columbus, Ohio from 1800 – 1920.

Activities:

- A. Read : “African Americans in Columbus City Schools, A Historical Perspective”
- B. Create a timeline using information retrieved from the above selection and from the selection, “Notable Milestones in the History of the Columbus Public Schools”. The timeline should include two notable facts for each decade from 1800-1920. The piece on notable milestones can be found by accessing the Columbus City Schools website at www.columbus.k12.oh.us

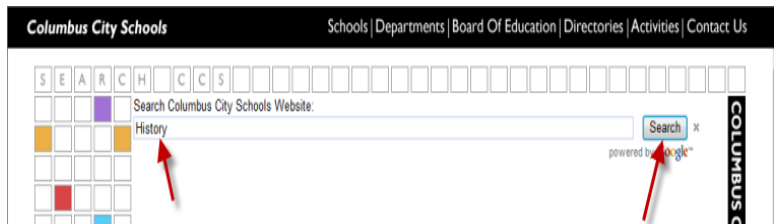
- a. The following screen will appear:



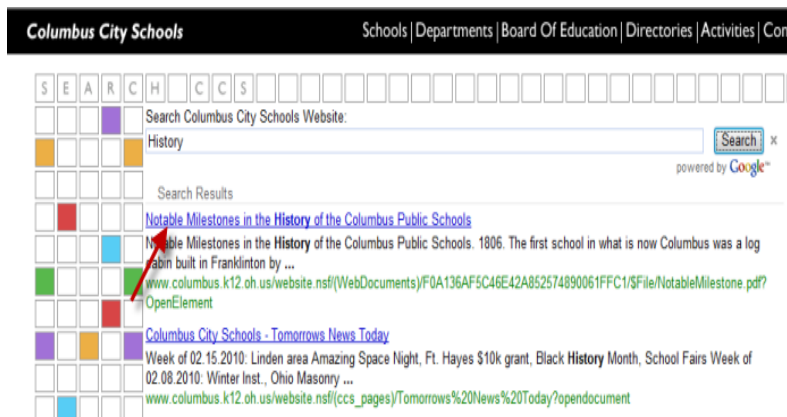
- b. Select “Search CCS Site”.



- c. The following screen will appear. In the search field, type the word *history* and select “search”.



- d. The following screen will appear. Select the piece “Notable Milestones in the History of Columbus Public Schools”



- e. The document, “Notable Milestones in the History of the Columbus Public Schools will appear in PDF format. Print this document for use as you create your timeline.

C. Quiz – Using the “Notable Milestones in the History of the Columbus Public Schools” document, circle the correct answer for the following questions:

1. The first school in Columbus Public Schools was a log cabin built on the west side of the river in what we now know as “Franklinton”. True or False
2. The name of the first school in Columbus Public Schools was the Loving School. True or False
3. The official date of opening for Columbus Public Schools was February 3, 1845. True or False
4. The first superintendent of Columbus Public Schools was Harold Eibling. True or False
5. John Geddes was the 2nd African American teacher hired by Columbus Public Schools. True or False
6. The High School of Commerce was later known as Central High School. True or False.
7. The first African American scholar to graduate from the Columbus High School with distinction was Mary E. Knight. True or False
8. James A. Rhodes, former Governor for the State of Ohio, resigned from the Columbus Board of Education to enter politics. True or False

9. Columbus Public Schools held its first district-wide evening music festival in 1920. True or False

10. In 1922, East High School was renamed the Horace Mann High School. True or False