

Round Top, Texas, African American Pioneers

The Era of Colored Schools

By David L. Collins, Sr.

Round Top, Texas is a unique place in the United States. It is a place where there are many untold stories - untold stories about African Americans. One such story is about the African American Pioneers of Round Top, Texas and their efforts in educating their children after the Civil War. This was done by starting their, own churches and schools.

In 1875 The La Grange Baptist Association had a membership of 58 Churches, twenty (20) of which were located Fayette County, Texas. Many of the churches built their own school, if not all of them. One such school was the Concord Missionary Baptist Church Colored School, located next to the Concord Missionary Baptist Church on the east side Highway 237, just across from the Mercantile Store of Round Top, Texas, which is in the City Limits. Many of the Colored Schools in Fayette County and Lee County were financed by the Rosenwald Foundation, and were located throughout the south.

A review of the 1900 Census, there were 474 African American Families living in the Round Top, Texas Area.

The Concord Missionary Baptist Church has been an active African American Church in Round Top, Texas and founded in 1867 with a membership of 186. This information is based on historical records of the La Grange Baptist District Association Historical Album published in 1993.

Several of the church members were, educators in the Round Top Colored School System such as Calvin Lindley Rhone (1867-1921) a Colored School Teacher in 1900's under the separate school system, which was probably not consolidated until the 1940's & 1950's. He and his wife Lucia J. Knotts-Rhone (1866-1941) were a highly regarded African American family who resided in Fayette County, Texas for nearly one hundred years, who raised 12 children (four (4) in Plum and eight (8) of whom were born in Round Top, Texas). His daughter Urissa Rhone-Brown, taught in the school system for many years, until she retired in the mid 1970's. In addition to her many years of teaching, she served as Principal of Round Top Elementary, Junior High, and High School until she retired.

Other Round Top Faculty included Iva Lee Rhone Tanner, Weldon Knotts, Sarah Simpson, and Pearline Knotts-Burrell. After retirement, Pearline Knotts-Burrell moved to Brenham. One of her relatives, Madison Knotts taught at the Round Top Colored School for several years. In the early 1900's he was Teacher and Principal at the Concord Missionary Baptist Church Colored School with 33 students attending the school. One of his prominent students was James Walter Dobbins who lived in Fayette County, Texas his entire life and was a Deacon at Concord Missionary Baptist Church until his death in 2005 at the age of 105.

Madison Knotts was born in Fayette County, Texas January 29, 1884, as a member of the prominent Knotts Family of the Round, Top Area. He attained two years of college education and dedicated years of his life educating African American Students, farming and raising his three (3) children. In 1920 he had apparently moved to Carmine, Texas and continued to live there thru the 1940's and 1950's until his death on December 21, 1961 in Giddings (Lee County), Texas. He is buried in the Giddings Cemetery.

Some of his prominent neighbors in Carmine, Texas were Wattman Ponfick, Fritz Bergmann, Hy Liebscher, Chester Mueller, Gerhardt Schroeder, Ernie Vietel, H. K. McCoy, Sam Townsend, E. P. Stuermer and Fritz Rust.



Round Top African American School cir 1900

School located in Round Top on Hwy 237 North next to the Concord Missionary Church. Teacher Madison Knotts. James Dobbins is one of the students in this picture.

Picture taken by Friederike Rechnagel – gifted by grandson, Ed Ahrich to Georgia Tubbs one of the founders of the Round Top Area Historical Society.

Sources:

Collins, David L., Sr. Family Oral History

Georgia Etzel-Tubbs of Round Top Texas

Fayette County, Texas Deed Records

Lee County, Texas Deed Records

U.S. Census Records for 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920 & 1940