

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORY 1981

Compiled and Edited  
by the  
History Book Committee  
of  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY, INC.  
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Conroe, Texas 77301

MARY PEOPLES  
Book Committee Chairman



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

May 11, 1981

Dear Friends:

I want you to know how grateful I am to learn of your generous actions on behalf of myself and the other men who were injured on March 30. You are shining examples of America's best natural resource -- her youth. God Bless you!

With deepest appreciation and best wishes for success,

Sincerely,

*Ronald Reagan*

Senior Class  
Conroe High School  
Conroe Montgomery County, Texas 77301

### EXCERPTS FROM: THE HISTORY OF CONROE NORMAL AND INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE 1903-1981

The above school was born in the mind of the late Dr. Jimmie Johnson who visualized the necessity for black girls and boys to have a thorough knowledge and training in Industrial Education. So, he traveled over the state of Texas lecturing and soliciting funds from black churches, associations, and conventions to make his dream a reality; even his wife Chaney, who had a small farm sold it and used the money to help finance the school. Many donations from individual blacks and whites were also contributed. Hence, in April, 1903, Conroe College came into existence. Dr. Johnson who had worked so hard getting the school established became its first president and founder.

The writer does not know the exact acreage that was bought by the founder, but the present site has always been the principle location. There are one hundred and five (105) acres more or less in the layout.

There were few teachers during his tenure of three years, so most of the work was done by him and his wife. Being mentally and physically tired, Dr. Johnson resigned from the presidency.

In 1906, Dr. Davis Abner became the

school's second president. He was one of the first graduates of Bishop College, a very influential and learned man of his day. He, like Dr. Johnson continued soliciting funds to help erect buildings, farm equipment, and etc. A campaign for students was begun and many students came from over Texas.

As the enrollment grew, the educational program was expanded. The Arts, Music and Theology and other courses were added.

According to Anna Henderson, the first

black public school was also started at Conroe College in the early years of Dr. Abner's Presidency. This is where she began school as a child when her family moved to Conroe. The public school had two classrooms and two teachers. Mr. R.J. Young was the principal. Later, the public school for blacks was moved from Conroe College and a three classroom building was built on the corner of what is now known as Sherman and 4th Streets.

Dr. Abner, having been president of Guadalupe College, brought several teachers who had worked with him there into the new venture. These teachers filled the positions for Music, Arts, Theology, Agriculture, Carpentry, Foods and others. The purpose of these courses was two-fold. First, to help individuals prepare themselves to make a living (very similar to the Vocational Schools today), and second, to help individuals who wanted to, to get a college degree.



Dr. and Mrs. Johnson on porch of president's home.

Several buildings were built; an administration, a two story building for men, a five story building for women, a President's home, and several cottages for faculty members. There was also a laundry house with tin tubs and rubbing boards, and iron pots on the outside; the facility was used for washing clothes. Both men and women used it. (Most of the students who came to school here at this time, were in their late teens and early adulthood). Clothes were ironed with flat iron. Uniform attire was worn by the women. They wore: Black skirts and white middie blouses. These had to be



seated in front: Jimmy Johnson, founder, Rev. J.P. DAVIS Sr., Dr. William A. Johnson, served as President

worn daily to class and on Sundays. The men had no special uniform for class, but had to be dressed neatly always, with coat and tie. On Sundays, dark suits were a must.

After thirteen years of leadership, Dr. Abner's health failed and his career ended in death.

Dr. William A. Johnson was elected President of the College in 1919. He was a graduate of Chicago University with a Degree in Theology. He was Dean of Theology at the school under the late Dr. Abner.

When he became president, the physical plant consisted of an administration building, President's home, a five story building for girls and women, a three story building for boys and men (young teen-agers had begun to enroll) a kitchen and dining area, a laundry house, and cottages for married faculty members and families who came here to attend school. The three story building for boys and men replaced the earlier two story after it burned. The college owned cows, hogs, and a farm where produce was grown. In addition to this, parents who brought their children to go to school and didn't have money to pay for them, made up with such things as vegetables, gallons of syrup, meat of various kinds, poultry, and dairy products. This helped to supplement food supplies so the money that was received could be used for other expenses.

The heating system was wood heaters and stoves. The lighting was kerosene lamps. The men and boys worked on the farm, felled the trees (from school land) for wood, milked the cows etc. Everyone had to work. Even those who were able to pay had assigned duties to perform and the farm duties were never left out because there had to be some farm training. The women and girls also had duties that they were responsible for, such as laundry, kitchen, dining, house, office and yard. Kerosene was bought and distributed to the students for their lamps. Years later, electricity was installed.

There were more than four hundred students enrolled during the school year. Some men who came to study for the ministry brought their families and lived either on the campus or in town. They sought jobs so they could support their families and to help themselves get through school. Through the recommendations of the school jobs were given by outstanding white families. Many times they made jobs just to help the students. Some of these were: The Dr. J.L. Hicks, The Everett, the Wahrenberger, the Simonton, the Judge Foster, the Hailey families and many more. These families gave cash donations as well, to help keep the doors of the college open.

Many individuals were influenced to attend Conroe College by members of the invincible male quartet, a singing group who traveled over the United States soliciting funds and campaigning for students.

Dr. and Mrs. Johnson were very devout christians, and their spiritual character was projected into the lives of the students who surrounded them. No one who came to go to school here was ever turned away, money or

no money.

All courses were important, but the most important one was the study of the Bible. All students were required to take a general Bible study course and courses in Christian Education. It was a part of your training. The atmosphere of Christianity and brotherly love prevailed.



Conroe Normal & Industrial College

In all life, there come some bad times. Conroe College was no exception. The depression years came, some of the buildings burned, and it was very difficult for the President. He would go out and preach at churches and the money he would get for preaching was used to help buy food to feed the students and share with the faculty members. Many times I saw Dr. and Mrs. Johnson on their knees praying together, pleading for God's help. Through it all however, he still lives in the lives of those he touched at Conroe College, and they are in leadership places in almost every walk of life.

Some of the dedicated teachers who worked at Conroe College were: S.A. Pleasant, Maggie Phillips, Ella Abner, E.W. Atkison, J.P. Daviss Sr., Maggie Frye, R.S. Cole, J.T. Washington, I.J. Cason, J.L. Sanders and Mrs. N.L.S. Adams.

Dr. Johnson, in his declining years became one of the most effective theologians of his day. His prayerful, understanding, courageous and sacrificial life as a President can be summed up in the following: "Faith takes up the cross, love binds the cross to the soul, and patience bears the cross unto the end of life."

The last chapter of his life ended August 1, 1946 in Beaumont, Texas.

Some other Presidents of Conroe College were: W.S. Brent, C.H. Durden, A.L. Bradley, J.S. Curry, (the present administration building was built while he was President). I.S. Spencer, and the present President, Rev. P.J. Walker, who was elected in 1971. Rev. Walker could be described as a quiet, unassuming, hard working Christian man. Since becoming President, he has put forth much effort and made many sacrifices to build a strong Conroe College. Today there is an enrollment of one

hundred seventy-six (176) students involved in the following studies: Typing, Religion, Bookkeeping, Welding and and an Adult Learning Center. President Walker is looking forward to a brighter future.

— Lucille Bradley

## MONTGOMERY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Montgomery schools date back to the early days of the Republic of Texas. In his description of a Yuletide excursion near Montgomery in 1838, Gustav Dresel names the "school-master" as being along on the holiday escapade. (1) Again, a list of Montgomery men paying tuition in 1839 for students in school in the same Bear Bend neighborhood, one mile east of present Montgomery, has been located in a private collection. (2) In February of 1842, the Galveston Daily Advertiser carried an ad for "English and Classical School near Montgomery" with the Rev. P.H. Fullenwider locating in the Landrum's neighborhood three miles west of Montgomery. (3) When the "new town" was platted in 1837 just prior to the creation of Montgomery County, provision was made for schools. Two citizens, Dr. E.J. Arnold and Lem Clepper, "bought a lot and gave it to the town to be used jointly by the Masonic Lodge and the Public school for public school". (4)

In 1848, the Legislature of the State of Texas passed an act stating . . . "That the institution for the educating of youth, now located in the town of Montgomery, in the county of Montgomery, shall be, and the same is hereby established at said town, by the name of the "Montgomery Academy of Montgomery County". (5)



Montgomery School Faculty about 1909 L-R Linda Paine (Price) next two unknown, Thomas James Paine.

This wording indicates a school here prior to the enactment of 1848.

Masonic Lodge #25 was established in Montgomery in 1845. (6) and took a great hand in educating the youth in Montgomery occupying jointly the building with Montgomery Academy.

The first free school came to Montgomery in 1872 being taught by Courtney and Hutchins.

School buildings in Montgomery occupied the same ground until 1925 when, through the influence of Rep. Robert A. Powell, the Thirty-