



# THE PALMER MEMORIAL INSTITUTE

An African American Preparatory School in Sedalia, North Carolina



A Traveling Exhibition of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University





**“I sit in a Jim Crow car, but my mind keeps company with the kings and queens I have known. External constraints must not be allowed to segregate mind or soul.”**

**—Charlotte Hawkins Brown, founder  
of Palmer Memorial Institute**



# THE PALMER MEMORIAL INSTITUTE

**Charlotte Hawkins Brown** (1883-1961), born in Henderson, North Carolina, and raised and educated in Massachusetts, returned to her home state to teach in 1901. The following year she established the Alice Freeman Palmer Memorial Institute (PMI) in Sedalia, near Greensboro, named after Brown's mentor and benefactor, the second woman president of Wellesley College. Brown's reputation grew nationally as she raised funds to expand campus facilities and worked to strengthen PMI's artistic and scholarly offerings. Through her efforts, the school evolved from an agricultural and manual training facility to a fully accredited, nationally recognized African American preparatory school. During her fifty-year tenure as president, more than one thousand students graduated from the school, before it closed in 1971. In 1987 the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum opened on the PMI grounds, North Carolina's first African American state historic site.

*The Palmer Memorial Institute* exhibition includes seventeen of Griffith Davis's black-and-white photographs of student life (circa 1947) at the Palmer Memorial Institute. The work of African American photographer Griff Davis, an accomplished photojournalist, has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Atlanta Daily World*, *Ebony*, *Time*, *Fortune*, *Negro Digest*, and *Der Spiegel*. The exhibit also includes Davis's 1947 *Ebony* magazine spread on PMI, text panels, and an audio documentary including interviews with Palmer Memorial Institute graduates.

The exhibition provides the opportunity for dialogue about segregation in education, black women's leadership and business development, the complexity of economic and educational standing of African Americans in the South during the Jim Crow era, and educational institutions' roles in developing strategies for economic success for African Americans, among other topics.

The Center for Documentary Studies (CDS) at Duke University offers traveling exhibitions—featuring documentary photography, audio, and video—that foster dialogue about contemporary memory, life, and culture; balance community goals with individual artistic expression; and cultivate progressive change. CDS also offers documentary workshops in conjunction with many of its exhibits.

**Contact:** Liz Lindsey, Exhibitions Coordinator  
Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University  
1317 W. Pettigrew Street, Durham, NC 27705  
919-660-3663 | <http://cds.aas.duke.edu>

This exhibition was organized by the Center for Documentary Studies from the Griffith Davis Collection, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University. Support for the traveling exhibition was provided by the North Carolina Humanities Council, a state-based program of the National Endowment for the Humanities; the North Carolina Arts Council, with funding from the State of North Carolina and the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art; and the St. Joseph's Historic Foundation Inc. at the Hayti Heritage Center.



Top front: *Posing with friends*; bottom front: *Dancing at the prom with classmate Robert Minor of Durham, North Carolina*; left: *Saying goodnight outside the girls' dorm after a dance*. Photographs by Griffith Davis.



