

The Brick School Legacy

The Brick School legacy lives on through the lives and achievements of its graduates. People who attended the school learned more than academics. They developed a sense of pride in achieving goals that affected them long after they left the classroom. Reflecting on the work of the school, Thomas Inborden wrote in 1934, "We have turned out graduates who are an honor to themselves and to the institution. We have sent out thousands of undergraduates... They have done exceedingly well in their chosen fields."

This legacy continues through the work of the Rocky Mount Area Brick School Club, composed of former students, graduates, and friends. Their support and encouragement helped make possible this exhibition of the history of the Joseph Keasbey Brick School and Junior College.

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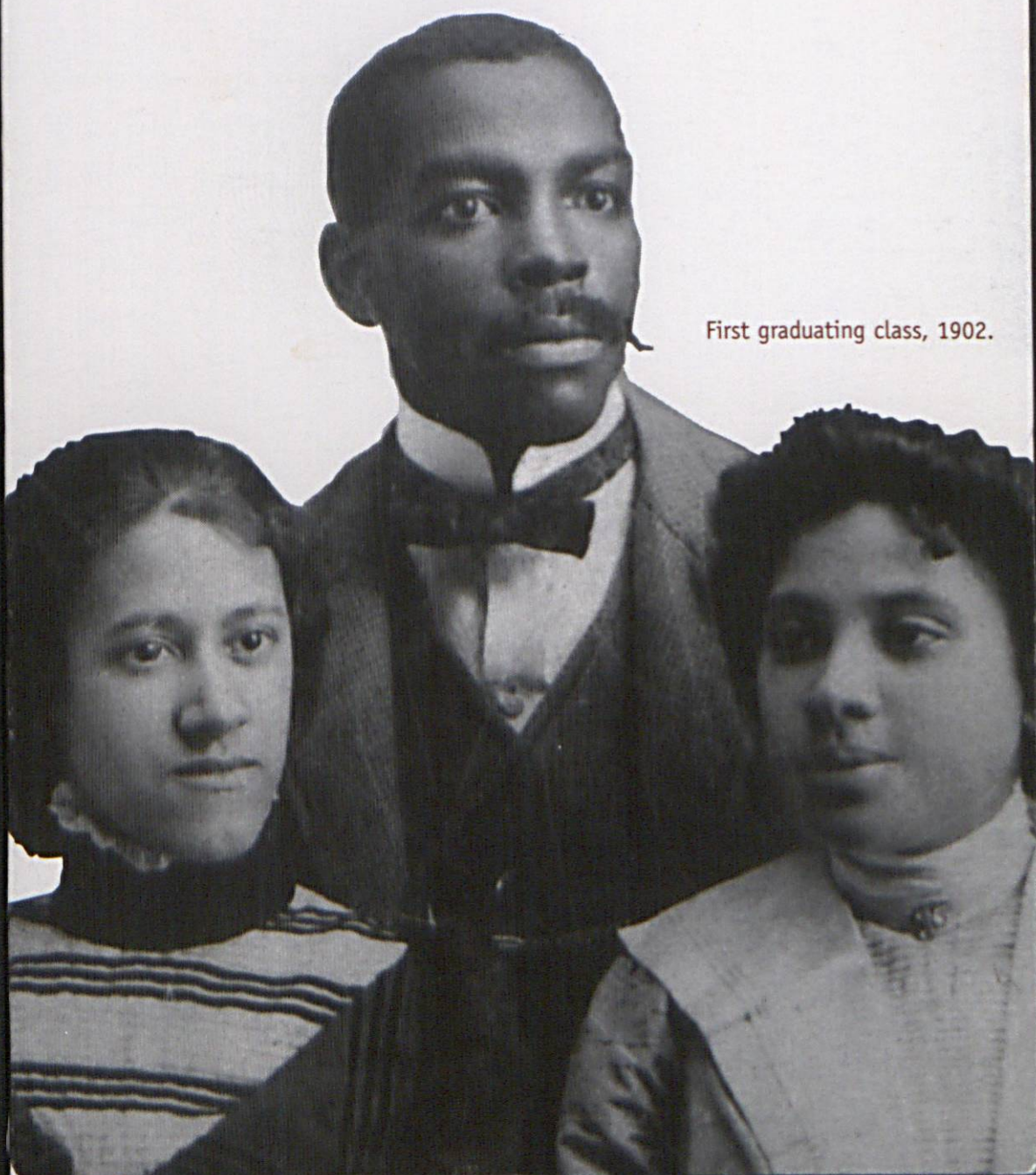
Answering the Cry for Life and Liberty:

The Joseph Keasbey Brick School and Junior College

1895-1933

From its opening in 1895
until its closing in 1933,
Brick School provided the
vision for “liberty and the
larger life” to thousands
of Blacks in eastern
North Carolina.

First graduating class, 1902.





Administration Building.



Downtown Enfield, early 1900s.

From its opening in 1895 until its closing in 1933, Brick School provided the vision for “liberty and the larger life” to thousands of Blacks in eastern North Carolina.

The school stood on the former Estes plantation, located three miles south of the small town of

Enfield, 70 miles north-east of Raleigh.

At one time the plantation had been used to break in slaves; old-timers could point to the spot where

the whipping post had stood. Before the Civil War, the tract had been known as the Wiggins land. Cultivating the plantation’s fertile soil with slave labor, owner Mason Wiggins had become known as an outstanding farmer in the state.

The train provided the most convenient transportation for many Brick teachers, students, and visitors to the campus. Teachers took the train to Rocky Mount to shop in the town’s department stores.





Early Brick School campus scene.



The campus day followed the rhythm of the trains, which passed through the western section of the school farm and crossed the treacherous trestle over Fishing Creek. Students referred to trains by name: *Shoo Fly, Eighty-nine, and Eighty.*

In the closing days of the Civil War, General Llewellyn Estes and his Army of the Potomac passed near the farm. Estes so liked the area that he returned in 1867 and bought the one-thousand-acre plantation. For years, he struggled in vain to make the farm pay.

Meanwhile in communities surrounding the Estes plantation, freed Blacks sought to assert the rights of their newly won citizenship: acquiring land, building communities, establishing schools. Their efforts, particularly in politics, gave the region a unique reputation.

Between 1865 and 1893, Blacks constituted a strong political force, exerting influence in local, state, and national government. Blacks in the Second District, in which the Estes plantation was located, elected hundreds of men to public office, including four men to Congress. Because of the large number of Blacks elected to political office, the District became known as the Black Second.

Panoramic view of Brick campus taken in the 1920s.





Early faculty (from left), front row: Mrs. Janet Keeble Cox, Mrs. Alice Davis, Mr. T.S. Inborden; second row: Mrs. Katie Dowdell McCarthy, Mr. L.J. Watkins, Mr. Isidore Martin, Mrs. Sarah Jane Evans Inborden (School Year 1896–1897).



Mrs. Julia Elmer Brick (left), her niece, Miss Lydia Benedict, and Dr. A.F. Beard, executive secretary of the American Missionary Association, during a visit to Brick School.

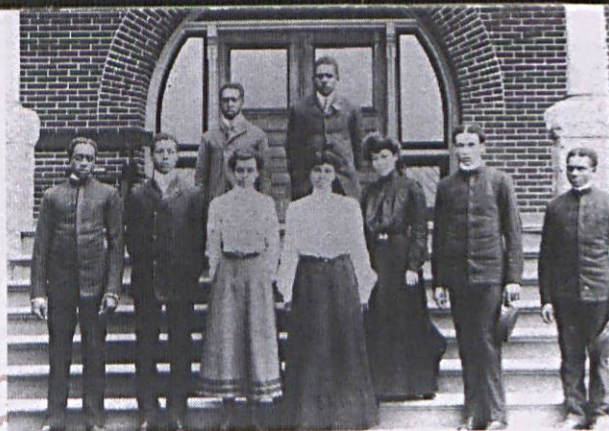
Toward the end of the nineteenth century, whites in the region sought to regain political dominance by disenfranchising Black voters. After the passing of a disenfranchising amendment to the state's constitution, George White, the district's former Black congressman, left the state, saying, "I can no longer live in North Carolina and be a man... ." The demise of Black political influence signaled the beginning of a new era during which education would become the battleground. While Blacks sought to use the schools to overcome the impact of oppression upon their hearts and minds, to achieve "liberty and the larger

Ingraham Chapel,
ca. 1900.





Mrs. Julia Elmer Brewster Brick, benefactor of Brick School. With great vision, Mrs. Brick donated the former Estes plantation to the American Missionary Association (AMA) for the purpose of establishing a school for Black youth. She provided money for the construction of buildings and, when she died in 1903, left funds for the school's future operation.



Graduating class of Brick School, 1904.

life," controlling interests sought the kind of education that would blunt Black assertiveness and perpetuate the language and practice of domination.

While Blacks had been playing an assertive role in politics, Estes had lost his plantation to Mrs. Julia Elmer Brick, a wealthy widow in Brooklyn, New York. Mrs. Brick had traveled in the South and knew the bitter racism which pervaded the area. She decided that the former Estes plantation should be used to establish a school for Black youth.

Mrs. Brick gave her plantation to the American Missionary Association, an international, evangelical, and former abolitionist organization. She also provided money for the construction of buildings.

The AMA had set up battlefield schools for Black soldiers during the Civil War, and, after the war, the AMA established schools all over the South. Many of those schools number among today's historically Black colleges, including Hampton Institute, Talladega College, and Fisk University.



Thomas Sewell Inborden
Principal, 1895–1926.
One of Oberlin Academy's Black students who graduated from Fisk University, Inborden dedicated his life to the full education of Black people.



Sarah Jane Evans Inborden
Teacher, 1895–1926.
Educated at Oberlin College, Sarah Inborden began teaching at the Brick School when her husband became principal. She taught English and mathematics and organized the library. She served the school for 31 years.

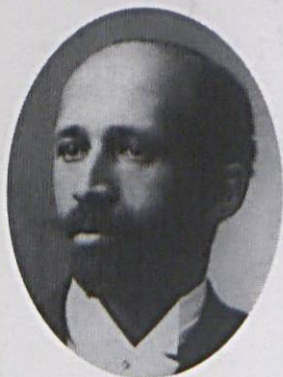
Brick School opened on October 1, 1895 — with one student. By year's end it had 54 students, including 13 boarders. During its most prosperous years, the school had an annual enrollment of “nearly four-hundred” students.

At a time when most Southern communities utterly neglected the secondary education of Black children, Brick School became an outstanding center of learning, offering students a liberal arts education as well as instruction in agriculture, domestic science, and manual arts. As a Black educational center, Brick School played a key role in the history of education in the United States.

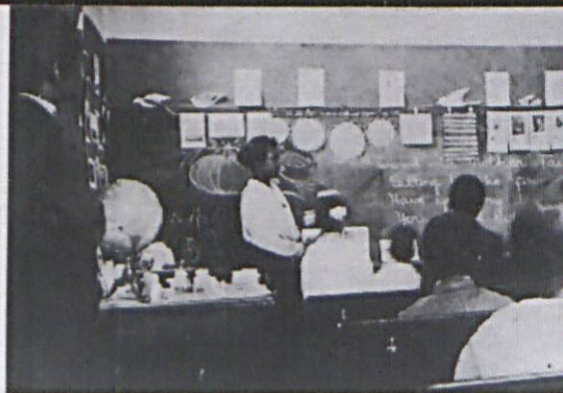
The AMA appointed Thomas Sewell Inborden as the first principal of Brick School. Inborden had attended Oberlin Academy and had graduated from Fisk University in 1891. After graduation, he served as pastor of a church in Beaufort, North Carolina, and then headed a school in Helena, Arkansas. He served as principal of Brick School until 1926, when he became *principal emeritus*.

Students picking strawberries.





W.E.B. Du Bois called the organized efforts of Blacks to develop schools "one of the most marvelous occurrences of the modern world; almost without parallel in the history of civilization."



Brick School stressed academic

Under Inborden's leadership, the school grew from a common or primary school to a junior college. Inborden also led Brick School toward a strategically prudent response to the educational debate waging at the time.

On one side of the debate, Booker T. Washington, educator, social reformer, and founder of Tuskegee Institute, proposed that Blacks should work for advances in education and employment rather than

social and political equality with whites. He advocated an education of basic agricultural and skilled labor techniques.

However, Black sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois demanded immediate equality and full rights for Blacks. He saw Washington's call for industrial



Principal Thomas Inborden in his study.





Tuskegee Institute founder Booker T. Washington called the eagerness of Blacks for education "a veritable fever." He favored a basic industrial education and the gradual acceptance of Blacks into the white community.



Manual arts were taught to all students.

education as a compromise in the quest for educational, political, and economic advancement for Blacks.

Brick School affirmed that the Black community needed both liberal and industrial education. The Brick curriculum included the typical requirements of a classical education while mandating that all students engage in manual labor. It also offered a work-study program which allowed any student to attend the school. By the time that Brick School became a junior college in 1925, it offered majors in arts and science, pre-medicine, and teaching. At the time of its closing in 1933, it was one of a few Black colleges in the South accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.





Brick School students, 1909.

Brick School graduated hundreds of students, many of whom continued their education at colleges and universities nationwide. Thus the school made an important contribution to the development of a professional class in the Black community.

Among the American Missionary Association (AMA) schools, Brick School had the most effective community outreach program, stimulating land ownership and modern farm practices among Black farmers on a wide scale. Long before the state allocated resources to help Black farmers, Inborden made visiting area farms an important aspect of his administration. He is said to have visited every farm within 50 miles of the school.

Inborden inspecting chickens and country hams during a farm visit.





A quiet moment to read.

Faculty member advising a student in the library.



The school's closing in 1933 stunned students, faculty, and the community, for in many ways Brick School had served as the educational, cultural, and spiritual pulse of the community. Several factors contributed to this decision: an absentee policy-making board, strategies of consolidation and selective support, reduced AMA revenues, declining student enrollment, and the elimination of the work-study program.

Despite its closing more than 60 years ago, the Brick School legacy continues to be reflected in the lives of the Brick alumni and their children. The site will remain forever sacred in the minds and hearts of those who knew and loved the Joseph Keasbey Brick School and Junior College.



Beginning in 1950, for more than 30 years, Brick alumni held reunions at the Brick School site. This reunion in the early 1950s drew hundreds of "Brickites," including Mae McWilliams Cofield and Grady Bell.

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