

CARVER SCHOOL

GATESVILLE, TEXAS

1904-1963

TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKER DEDICATION

October 4, 2025

**Research and Presentation by Sherry Lawrence
Coryell County Historical Commission**

CARVER SCHOOL

Carver School, also known as George Washington Carver School¹, was established to provide higher education for the African American children of Lincolnville, a community about five miles northwest of Gatesville, Texas, that was established by formerly enslaved Coryell County residents at the end of the Civil War. The African American school at Lincolnville only provided education through the seventh grade.² Seeing a need for their children to continue their education, the Lincolnville school trustees, Tom Sneed, Sam Adams, and Zibe Squyres, purchased Lot No. 6, in Block No. 4 of the Chrisman Addition, for a school in Gatesville, on February 19, 1904.³ This property, in the area of Gatesville that was set aside by the city government for African American housing, was the first location of Carver School. It was near the former Bethlehem Baptist Church, now known as the Harvesting Souls International Church.

While some African Americans lived in Gatesville, many of the African American children had to walk from their homes in Lincolnville to attend Carver School. Their trip to the school included walking across a dangerous railroad trestle and passing through pastures to avoid having to cross the Leon River.⁴

There are no official records documenting the curriculum or staff for the earliest Carver School, but one student, Bessie Lee Barrens Stafford, recalled that the students played basketball and tennis, when she attended from about 1910 to 1914.⁵

On May 9, 1929, Gatesville Independent School District (G.I.S.D.) purchased about two and a half-acres of land, in the Hooper Addition of the African American section of Gatesville, from Maggie Bell Hooper and her siblings.⁶ This property, located at the corner of Church St. and Mill St., is a few blocks east of the original Carver School site. The second Carver School building was built at the new site, and the original Carver School building was torn down.⁷ The new building had two rooms and a basement, and both grammar and high school grades were taught there by two African American teachers.^{8,9}

Students at this Carver School had basketball teams and a band, but the students had to make their own uniforms for these activities. The Carver students used the basement of their school to conduct entertainment programs to raise money. This money was used to purchase supplies to make basketball uniforms from undershirts that the students dyed and hand lettered. The students also made their band uniforms.¹⁰ These activities brought the Carver students closer together and created a pride in their school. That pride encouraged several of the former students, including Myrtice Weatherly Chatman, Grady Edward Barrens, Sr., and Gussie Lee Weatherly Scott, to return to Carver School as teachers, after receiving degrees from African American universities such as Paul Quinn University or Prairie View A & M. University.¹¹

The third and final Carver School building was erected on the site of the second Carver School at Church St. and Mill St., in Gatesville; and it was completed in May of 1951.¹² This single-level building was made from cinder blocks and had plastered exterior walls. In 1958, the Gatesville school board approved adding another room to the Carver School building by contractor Porter Adams,¹³ resulting in an L-shaped, three-room building. Later a small frame house was added on the lot adjacent to the main building, and it was used by the first through fourth grade students. The fifth through seventh grade students were taught in one room of the

main school building, while the eighth through twelfth grade students were taught in the second room. All students in the grade groups were taught together, with the students sitting quietly until their grade lessons were conducted by the teacher.¹⁴

Students at the third Carver School participated in a variety of activities including spelling bees, sports, and musicals. One of Carver School's principals N. T. Stonum was an accomplished musician, who helped the students with public choral presentations.¹⁵ Fund raisers such as a Spring Show performed by the Carver School students at the Gatesville City Auditorium, on May 3, 1957, helped the students pay for their sports uniforms and other school programs.¹⁶

The Carver School boys' and girls' basketball teams, the Tigers and the Tigresses, participated in tournaments held among other area African American schools. Home games were played at the Gatesville Junior High gymnasium, since the Carver School did not have its own facility. Local businessmen, led by Sam Powell, Jr., paid the Carver School debt for team uniforms on more than one occasion.¹⁷

End of school awards were presented to outstanding Carver School students; the awards for the 1958-1959 school year were given to the best students in these categories: scholarship, merit, perfect attendance, cooperation, cleanliness, good sportsmanship, mathematics, pep squad, and the Tigers' sweetheart.¹⁸

Carver School also provided a facility for adult African American educational programs. One occasion was a breast cancer awareness film, which was presented to 47 African American parents and students at the school, when the film became available in Gatesville.¹⁹

A highly anticipated school activity at the closing of each school year was enjoyed by students and their parents. For this celebration, the African Americans in Gatesville went back to their original school building in Lincolnville, where many of them had attended school during their early school years. The party began with a baseball game, followed by a big dinner on the grounds, and then the students would present plays and musical or comedy skits to fill out the day. This was a joyous occasion for the entire African American community.²⁰

Carver School, like similar African American rural schools in Texas, was not immediately touched by the 1954 ruling, *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* that made school integration a federal law. The only noticeable change was the coverage of Carver School activities in the local newspaper, which had been mostly ignored prior to 1954. The quiet existence of Carver School ended forever with the announcement by G.I.S.D. superintendent L. C. McKamie that the Carver high school grades did not receive accreditation by the state of Texas and would be closed effective for the 1962 fall term.²¹

The nine Carver School high school students were offered free bus transportation to the African American high school in McGregor, Texas; but the offer was not satisfactory for the students. Instead, the Carver high school students attempted to enroll in Gatesville High School on August 28, 1962; but their request was denied. In September 1962, the students' parents filed a lawsuit against Gatesville High School and its representatives, seeking integration of Gatesville schools. The case, known as Civil Action Case No. 2276, *Nona Florence Carter, Et Al vs. O. N. Hix, Et Al*, was decided by Judge Ben H. Rice, Jr. of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas, in Waco, on March 7, 1963. Judge Rice ruled that all Gatesville schools must operate as integrated schools beginning with the 1963 fall term.^{22, 23}

-
- ⁵ "Oral Memoirs of Bessie Lee Barrens Stafford," *Baylor University Libraries-Digital Collections*, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Sharpless, M. Rebecca, interviewer, Stafford residence, 431 Daughtrey, Waco, Texas, 7 May 1987, <https://digitalcollections-baylor.quartexcollections.com>. Transcript, p. 15.
- ⁶ Coryell County Deed Records, Vol. 110, page 270. Maggie Hooper, et al to GISD.
- ⁷ Stafford, Bessie, p. 6.
- ⁸ "Oral Memoirs of Ophelia Mae Mayberry Hall," *Baylor University Libraries-Digital Collections*, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Sharpless, M. Rebecca, interviewer, Hall residence, 1312 Mill St., Gatesville, Texas, 26 May 1986-10 June 1986, <https://digitalcollections-baylor.quartexcollections.com>. Transcript, p. 42.
- ⁹ Adams, Deola, p. 21.
- ¹⁰ Adams, Deola, p. 21.
- ¹¹ Adams, Deola, p. 34.
- ¹² "This Was News-10, 20 Years Ago." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 56, No. 42, 12 May 1961, p. 9, www.newspapers.com. Excerpt from 11 May 1951 issue.
- ¹³ "Contract Is Let For New Addition to Negro School." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 1 August 1958, p. 1, www.newspapers.com.
- ¹⁴ Scott, David. "Gatesville Resident Recalls Time at Carver School." *Gatesville Messenger*, Vol. 119, No. 99, 8 August 2020, p. 1. <https://www.gatesvillemessenger.com/edition/>.
- ¹⁵ "Randal A. Carter, Tenor, Gives Recital." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 53, No. 43, 23 May 1958, p. 3, www.newspapers.com.
- ¹⁶ "Carver School Gives Spring Show Tonight." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 52, No. 40, 3 May 1957, p. 1, www.newspapers.com.
- ¹⁷ "Carver Basketballers To Play Belton Here." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 55, No. 19, 4 December 1959, p. 11, www.newspapers.com.
- ¹⁸ "Awards Presented to Carver Students." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 54, No. 45, 5 June 1959, p. 3, www.newspapers.com.
- ¹⁹ "500 Women See Free Cancer Film." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 53, No. 35, 28 March 1958, p. 1, www.newspapers.com.
- ²⁰ Adams, Deola, pp. 37-38.
- ²¹ Scott, David, "Gatesville Resident Recalls Time at Carver School."
- ²² "Gatesville Will Integrate Schools." *The Waco News-Tribune*, Vol. 66, No. 120, 8 March 1963, pp. 1, 5, www.newspapers.com.
- ²³ "Schools Must Integrate Here, U.S. Court Rules." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 58, No. 33, 8 March 1963, p. 1, www.newspapers.com.
- ²⁴ "Carver School Opens With 8-Grade System." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 58, No. 7, 7 September 1962, p. 15. www.newspapers.com.
- ²⁵ Scott, David, "Gatesville Resident Recalls Time at Carver School."
- ²⁶ "Commencement Held For Carver Seniors." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 57, No. 47, 15 June 1962, p. 5, www.newspapers.com.
- ²⁷ "School Integration Proves Peaceful." *Gatesville Messenger and Star Forum*, Vol. 59, No. 7, 6 September 1963, p. 1, www.newspapers.com.
- ²⁸ Coryell County Deed Records, Vol. 243, pp. 429-431. Warranty Deed No. 2555, G.I.S.D. to F. A. Morris, Jr.
- ²⁹ Scott, David. "The passing of a landmark." *Gatesville Messenger*, Vol. 127, No. 112, 30 October 2021, pp. 1-2, <https://www.gatesvillemessenger.com/edition/>.