

A History of Negro Elementary Education in Indianapolis.*

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Indianapolis was hewn from a wilderness infested with Indians. It was not long after the founding of the new capital city until some Negroes were included in the population. Little was done to provide schools for children, either Caucasians or Negroes, for many years after the admission of Indiana into the Union, though the constitution of 1816 included the following provision:

It shall be the duty of the General Assembly as soon as circumstances will permit to provide by law for a general system of education, ascending in regular gradation from township schools to a state university, wherein tuition shall be gratis, and equally open to all.

To such schools as the State had to offer, the authorities gladly admitted Negroes without discrimination:

Colored children were found in many public schools in common with white children. Comparative little prejudice was manifested toward them until about the year 1830 when abolition sentiments created a sensation in the nation. They were then generally excluded from the free schools of the state. Their rights have been restored by the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and in 1869 special legislation was made in their favor.¹

A few schools existed in Indianapolis to which colored children were admitted. These provided the first elementary education for Negroes in the city, but this was very little.

By the time the second State constitution was framed, the people were not so friendly to Negro education. This constitution, which was framed in 1850-1851, contained clauses which read:

No Negro or Mulatto shall come into or settle in the State, after the adoption of this Constitution.

All contracts made with any Negro or Mulatto coming into the State, contrary to the foregoing section shall be void: and any person who shall employ such Negro or Mulatto, or other wise encourage him

* This paper is an abbreviated master's thesis accepted by the Faculty of Teachers' College, Columbia University.

¹ John M. Alcott, *Indiana Schools*, p. 26.

to remain in the State, shall be fined in any sum not less than ten dollars, nor more than five hundred dollars.

These provisions of the constitution were enforced by law after 1852 and Negroes were actually prevented from coming into the State. Sentiment in favor of the anti-negro provisions was strong in Indianapolis. So rigidly were the laws arising under the second provision enforced that an incoming negro's marriage was declared void.² The constitution remained unchanged until 1881, sixteen years after the adding of the Thirteen amendment to the Constitution of the United States, though, during the years following the Civil War, the Negro population of Indianapolis increased rapidly.

It is obvious that little could or would be done in preparing a race for citizenship through education in the period when anti-Negro sentiment was so strong. Opposition to Negroes was largely economic, just as the use of Negroes as slaves in the South was due to economic interest. Negro competition, the people of Indiana did not desire, hence they attempted to keep the race out of the State. Nevertheless, though in the South, the Negro might eat and sleep and enjoy his dingy cabin, yet in Indiana, including Indianapolis, a Negro, desiring to come into the State, could find "no where to lay his head."

In 1817, a legislative committee included the following in a report to Governor Jonathan Jennings:

It is a well known fact, that, whatever may be the opinion of our citizens on the abstract principles of slavery, and however repugnant it may appear, in their estimation, to moral justice, there is but one sentiment prevalent on this subject of people of color migrating in any circumstance to this state. It is believed if not restricted, it would in time, become an evil of not much less magnitude than slavery itself.

Albert G. Porter, who later become Governor of Indiana, declared in a speech of May 2, 1860, in the national House of Representatives:

It is not probable, sir, with the prejudices of my early education, that I would be likely to have too great sympathy for Negroes. In Indiana we have adopted a constitutional provision that no negro, whether bound or free, shall be allowed to come within its limits. Why was this provision adopted? Because it was believed that negro labor ought not to be suffered to come into competition with white labor in

² *Barkshire v. The State*, 7 Ind. 389.

Indiana. What is the policy of the Republican party? It is to exclude slavery from the Territories for that identical reason; and in the canvass which I made in the sixth district of Indiana, I always took that position. I never advocated the doctrines that negroes ought to be put upon a political or social equality with the white race . . . we put our advocacy of the exclusion of negroes upon the same ground on which it was put into our state constitution—that negro labor ought not to be allowed to come into competition with white labor in the territories . . .³

With the feelings that existed against Negroes in Indiana, what could be done for them educationally? What type of citizens could they possibly become? No schools, no right to come into the State, suffrage denied to those already in residence, and popular antagonism toward them—these were the clouds they had to face.

The ancestral background of the Negro was unfavorable for shaping the race into creditable citizenship. In Africa, heathenism, barbarianism, superstition and ignorance prevailed. In America for over two and a half centuries, succeeding generations of the race were denied schools. In Indianapolis, during the period of development from a wilderness to a city, Negroes formed an element in the population, but they were left in ignorance.

The clouds overhanging the Negroes of Indianapolis held them in the "gutter", but others were there also. There was a widespread sentiment against providing free, public education for anyone. Negroes could live without but so could white boys and girls. An educational storm was required to remedy matters.

The first charter for the city of Indianapolis included no provision for public schools. When the measure was pending in the Legislature, S. V. B. Noel offered an amendment providing for free schools, and a storm resulted. Opponents of the provision held that they and their fathers had succeeded without public schools. To provide schooling by taxation would lead to extravagance. "A man could keep store, chop wood, physic, plow, plead and preach without an education, and what more was needed?" Continuing, the *Report of the Indianapolis Schools for 1866*, summarized the arguments, not without sarcasm:

The fleetest, long-nosed, deep rooting hogs, and most flexible hoop-

³ *Cong. Globe*, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., Part 3, p. 1903.

poles spring spontaneously from the soil. Without the aid of Science, Nature had enriched us with the fruitfulest power of mud. The wilderness of Indiana had been subdued, and teeming crops grew luxuriant over the graves of the dead savages, all done by unlearned men. Besides it would be a precedent full of evil to set the young city, the seat of the State government, agoing with reckless expenditure foisted into its charter. It might react on the legislature by the influence of example and millions be squandered in internal improvements more mischievous than those they were then staggering under. For their part, "sink or swim," etc., they were opposed to any such fanaticism⁴

The enemies of free schools were strong, and Indianapolis suffered sadly. Both races were affected. No policy could be inaugurated until an election was held by the inhabitants of the city. The referendum turned in favor of free schools. "The voting of the venerable Judge Blackford was cheered as he openly voted a ballot endorsed 'Free Schools' and other citizens followed his lead".⁵ This step of Judge Blackford led to immediate provision for elementary schools in the city of Indianapolis, which have so developed until today all citizens may enjoy them whether white or black. In appreciation of Judge Blackford's bold step a street was later named in his honor. Public Elementary School No. 4 for Negro children and a magnificent church of the race grace two of its corners at the present time.

With this noble step of Judge Blackford and the triumph of free schools, there was an abatement in the storm, but it did not cease. The schools did prosper for a short time. In January, 1853, the Common Council of the city of Indianapolis selected the first school trustees. They were Messrs. Henry P. Coburn, Calvin Fletcher and H. P. West. On March 2, 1856, the Board elected the first superintendent of the city schools—Mr. George B. Stone. Under the leadership of these men, the schools "were conducted with vigor and success." Money was wisely invested in school lots and buildings, some of which were converted into elementary schools thirteen years later for Negroes. This "golden age" laid the seed for elementary education for all citizens of Indianapolis.

Many realize their importance and continue to honor members of the first Board of Education. Elementary School No. 66 bears the name, The Henry P. Coburn School. It stands

⁴ See the *Annual Report of Schools* (Indianapolis) for 1866, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

at 604 East Maple Road Boulevard, one of the city's most beautiful thoroughfares. Elementary School No. 8 is today called the Calvin Fletcher School and stands on Fletcher Avenue, both named in honor of Mr. Fletcher. Mr. H. P. West has also been duly honored by naming a street in his honor. The city's new Crispus Attucks High School for Negro children and the largest Negro business establishment of the city are located on West street. A new Y.W.C.A. for Negro girls is now under construction on the same street.

The "golden age" was rudely ended, when the Supreme Court of Indiana, early in 1858, decided that taxes for the payment of tuition (salaries or wages to public school teachers) could not be constitutionally collected by the local units of the State. The effect was most disastrous. This decision threw the new public schools on the bounty of the interest derived from the State School Fund. This was "sufficient to keep the schools open one feeble 'free quarter' each year; and in 1850 even this was altogether omitted for want of money."⁶

Adequate schools could not be maintained for any children. In 1867, the Legislature passed a new law providing for the raising of funds for a public school system in the State. Under this law, taxes were levied, collected and an extensive system of schools established. Since the early seventies, when the first funds came into the hands of local school officials under this law of 1867, a short period indeed, the extensive and expensive free school system of Indiana has been developed.

When the victory was about to be won in 1867, there was uncertainty as to whether Negroes would share in the advantages of the system about to be inaugurated. Would the ideals in regard to Negro training left behind by the Governor of Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison, by Governor Jonathan Jennings and others be thrust aside?

In 1866, four men of Indianapolis with vision sensed the fact that if the city was to prosper, education for all its citizens alike must be offered. Their appeal for "The Education of Colored Person" included these paragraphs:

For reasons which cannot be consistently stated or explained by any who approve taxation for the support of the schools, the colored

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

people of the state and city have from the beginning to this time been deprived of advantages from the school fund, or any privileges of the schools. If general taxation is for the protection of the community and adds to its wealth and greatness, is not that prosperity lessened by so much as any class are permitted to grow up in ignorance? Is an ignorant black man a less evil than an ignorant white? Is a black savage a milder type of heathen than a white one?

Unless, then, our law and constitution makers assume that black ignorance is more genial and tolerable than white, and inflicts less injury on the public, then it is obvious that it should be educated and made to add to the prosperity of the community. Or if it is at all an evil then it should have a remedy. If to keep the blacks in ignorance is a gentler curse than to keep the whites in that condition, it seems to follow that black civilization would be of a higher type than white,—a position which the advocates of Negro barbarism would be loth to assume.

As the degradation of any class is a radiating evil, and affects all injuriously with no compensating advantage to any, it is important that it should cease, if within the reasonable means or facilities of the public.

The constitution of Indiana, never overflowing with kindness toward this people, has yet for fifteen years instructed the general assembly to provide by law for common schools "Where in tuition shall be without charge and equally open to all": and for fifteen years the Negroes of Indiana have been a portion of all.

According to the late census of the city taken last summer there are 1,653 colored inhabitants. Of these nearly three hundred are attending private colored pay schools conducted and supported by themselves, and to a very limited extent if at all, dependent on the charities of the public. The large portion of the colored children attending pay school is very creditable to this people and indicates an earnest desire for improvement. . . . In our judgment, humanity, justice and sound public policy demand that this class of our citizens shall receive the benefit of our common school system.⁷

The men who prepared and signed this plea were: Thomas B. Elliott, president of the School Board of Indianapolis; Clemons Vonnegut, vice-president; W. H. L. Noble, treasurer; and A. C. Shortridge, superintendent of schools. So firmly did these men implant the corner stone of negro education in the city of Indianapolis that their spirit and the results of their deeds live after them. The writer desires that every Negro should know and always respect and honor these men who laid the educational corner stone for the Negroes of Indianapolis when they were friendless, poverty stricken and ignorant. The writer was recently shocked when convers-

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

ing with a veteran leader of the city concerning the work of these men, to find that he was ignorant of this masterly appeal. Every Negro father and mother should know of those who made their prosperity and citizenship possible. They should unveil the deeds of these educational martyrs to their children. The race should not forget them but should always accord them respect.

The city of Indianapolis has endeavored to honor these men. A splendid High School has been named the Shortridge High School. Elementary School No. 9 has been named the Clemons Vonnegut School. Noble Street of the city bears its name in honor of the Mr. Noble who signed the appeal of 1866. These men, as others mentioned, have the distinction of having educational institutions and streets of Indianapolis named in their honor. Such is indeed distinction. Usually such honors are based on gifts of money with the names of benefactors appended after death. The men here portrayed did not buy distinction. It has been freely given in recognition of their sacred stand when laying an educational corner stone for a helpless race. As a direct result of their efforts, interest and stirring appeal, the race has been able to receive education. Through it, Negroes have been enabled to prove themselves deserving of the country's prided citizenship.

These men who so nobly placed the corner stone for the education and citizenship of the Negro, also aided in erecting the first educational pillar over this corner stone. It is true in all building that the erection is more difficult than the laying of a single stone. While it took courage to appeal for a race, which was scorned and disliked, yet these brave men met the challenge. That earnest appeal of 1866 was, however, much more easily made than executed. Nevertheless, the builders began their trying and arduous task breaking themselves down in health and body in order to complete it.

So fully and authentically has Mr. Shortridge traced the struggle in erecting this educational pillar which first granted to the Negro school training, and of such decided value is it, that no apology needs to be offered for giving his account:

The question of proper provision for educating colored children in Indianapolis had been urged by men and women many times and in various ways. The average lawmakers are afraid of certain questions,

such as the tramp nuisance or the gypsy business, kindred evils and practices which have no right to exist in a civilized country. The question of woman's suffrage never gets a fair hearing. A way can always be found either in caucus or committee to smother it. It was exactly this way for many years with the question of negro education.

The lawmaker who come to Indianapolis every two years and promised to do great things for the betterment of conditions throughout the state, could be induced to agree to almost anything; but when it came to a show-down by voting on a few questions, negro education among the number, he was not ready. Colored children were all about us and were rapidly increasing in numbers. More than three hundred years ago, when forcibly brought to the American continent, they early embraced the theory about which we hear so much of late, that it is their duty to multiply and replenish the earth. In Indianapolis there were hundreds of adult American citizens and there were many hundreds of children, nearly all of whom were illiterate and many of them vicious to our civilization. Were they the less so because covered with a black skin? If they were a menace, what was our plain duty?

In regard to the conduct of the Legislature, the venerable educator continued in his newspaper account of 1908:

Fifty years ago the Indiana State Teachers' Association, then and ever since a mighty educational power in the state, began the agitation for colored schools. In ten or twelve years there were signs of approaching success. In 1867 an attempt was made to secure the needed legislation but without avail. An effort was renewed at the opening session of 1869. An amendment to the law was offered and favorable action was taken in the committees and in due time was passed in the Senate. Action at the other end of the capitol was more dilatory. The amendment was hung up till 11:30 the last night of the session and the chairman of the committee said: "It is now or never." A half dozen persons began the work of getting the members from the cloakroom and lobbies into their seats. I remember that the late Professor Bell, Thomas J. Vater and number of other patriotic and humane men did all that was possible for them to do. But the amendment failed for want of a constitutional majority—fifty-one. Forty-six of the requisite number to pass it were present; it was not enough to pass the measure. But this was the last night of the session and any one who has been present on these occasions knows how things are done. A truthful description of what took place on this particular night would not look well in a newspaper.

So it looked at the moment as if black children were doomed to run the streets for another term of two years while their fathers and mothers continued to pay their taxes, by the aid of which the children of the more favored race, were kept in school ten months of the year. For some reason, I do not remember what, the governor found it necessary to call an extra session of the legislature, and it was at this

called session, May 13, 1869, that the amendment to the law admitting colored children to the public school privilege was passed.

This meant that the school authorities must provide a larger number of buildings and spend larger sums for equipment. Says Mr. Shortridge, who was superintendent of schools in 1869, "some of the buildings already abandoned were repaired and replenished; others were rented, properly seated and made quite comfortable. By the first of September [1869] we were ready for all who might apply." It was necessary to find a teaching force to supply the new schools for Negroes. Regarding the problem, the superintendent wrote almost forty years later:

Meanwhile a constant search was kept up for competent colored men and women who could do the teaching. The plan was to use colored teachers when they could be found, and white ones when they could not. During the summer months, Sunday afternoon meetings were held in some of the colored churches, where needful information was given to parents and guardians as to what would be expected of them when their children were to enter school. These meetings were largely attended, and with much enthusiasm in view of the fact of what was soon to occur.

This must have been interesting and exciting for this ignorant race many of whom so eagerly desired education. For countless centuries in Africa and for two hundred and fifty years in America, the Negro race had been deprived of education. The long looked for and prayed for time was now at hand.

Mr. Shortridge describes the situation on the day when the Negro schools were opened:

When the day came the buildings were crowded early with a herd of rowdy and undisciplined blacks, and with a strong teaching force in number about equally divided between the races. Order was at once restored, and the work of classifying and grading was begun. Five years after they were admitted to the schools there were in attendance at both day and night schools over eight hundred pupils.⁸

Those Negroes who were compelled to work and therefore unable to attend day school went to night school. They have continued to do so. At present there are nine night schools

⁸ For the matter quoted from Mr. A. C. Shortridge, see his article in the *Indianapolis News* of April 4, 1908. This article is headed "Teachers' Training School", but the last third of it is devoted to the beginnings of elementary education for Negroes in Indianapolis.

for Negroes held in the fifteen colored schools of the city. In 1879, it was said of them: "In the colored [evening] schools so great was the anxiety of the pupils [mostly adults and often gray-headed] to learn that all that was necessary was to provide the opportunity. The pupils in the white schools were quite young, many being but twelve or sixteen years of age, and quite a portion came merely for fun and variety rather than from any appreciation of the importance to them of study The white night schools were not worth their cost, while the colored schools were a remunerative investment." This was written about the negro night schools by Mr. H. S. Tarbell just ten years after Negroes were permitted to attend the public schools. Mr. Tarbell was then the superintendent of the city schools.⁹

The first pillar of the race was now firmly erected over the corner stone around which the citizenship of the race was to be built. Readin', writin' and 'rithmetic were given at both day and night schools. The race was now getting the tools which were to make them independent. They were learning to read and figure for themselves. They were for the first time in their long history receiving enlightenment. With good books, they were able to drive away their superstitions, gloom and fears. This precious pillar, made possible by the law of May 13, 1869, was so firmly erected that no cloud, no storm and no Sampson of prejudice can ever destroy or overthrow it. It is a priceless pillar to the race and with it the Negroes of the city of Indianapolis have become and are yet becoming more efficient and creditable citizens of the city and nation.

The public schools of the city were at last giving the Negro race their three "Rs". The schools then were in their primitive stage and learning to read, write, figure and spell meant an education for most people. It, however, did not mean the highest citizenship. In 1874, Mr. Shortridge resigned and Mr. George B. Stone again assumed the superintendency which he held until 1879, when Mr. H. S. Tarbell was appointed. Mr. Tarbell saw that the schools were not meeting the civic challenge of the times. This was not only true of the Negro race but of both races. He saw that moral and character training must be given in the schools if they were

⁹ *Annual Report of Schools (Indianapolis)* for 1879, p. 27.

to fulfill their mission. He said: "If a boy is going to make a bad man, the less we do for him intellectually the better."¹⁰ Education was being given to all, but the lives of the pupils were not guided. Negroes were suffering as were the whites. Observing this fact, Mr. Tarbell stated: "In some sections of our city it is well nigh impossible to rear a child as one would wish." Continuing, the Superintendent described the sad conditions:

A parent said to me not long ago, "You can not bring up a child without his learning to fight and swear. When we moved here my boy could not go to the grocery without being set upon by the boys of the streets, and he had to fight to take care of himself."

The vicious boys in some sections of the city are an annoyance to the adults of their vicinity and a terror to well disposed children. They congregate upon the street corners and in the alleys and upon the vacant lots or in the old buildings and entice away from school those whose tastes lead them to enjoy the freedom and frolic of the streets better than the restraint and study of the school room. It is sad enough to think that these boys are growing up to recruit the criminal and dissolute class, but the sadder thing is that they, like a whirlpool, draw into an equal destruction hundreds that if kept from their influences would make virtuous, industrious citizens. Each year will find it worse in its nucleus and wider reaching in its corruption.

It is obvious that the schools had not improved much in the city. They were doing the city little good and doing nothing morally. Opponents of free education were beginning to murmur. Mr. Tarbell began to work in earnest for moral and character education to be given in the schools. He saw that the schools, if they were to be a worthy asset to the city, must not only teach the three "Rs" but must have a new and broader duty to perform. Mr. Tarbell declared:

Our duties now evidently are to enter the entire field of public school work and cultivate it thoroughly in its length and its breadth; to improve our process of instruction; to study the child mind and come into sympathy with it so that school life shall be pleasanter and more profitable than now. The direction in which our public schools can secure the most ready and profitable growth is in gathering into them and subjecting to moral ameliorating and helpful influences [the children who were under evil influences]. . . .¹¹

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Thus was set up the second educational pillar for the Negro race. Negroes were not in the schools. Mr. Tarbell did not intend this moral education for white boys and girls alone, but for all boys and girls of the city. He particularly intended it for those of the lower class who were deprived of elevating home influences. This the Negro had not and knew little of. Jungles had housed their tribal ancestors. Cabins had sheltered their parents in slavery and shanties were sheltering most of the race in the city then. They were also greatly increasing in numbers. In speaking of this, the superintendent said: "In 1869, just ten years ago, the colored of the city were admitted to the privileges of the public schools, but in buildings separate from the white children."

From 1869 to 1876, the colored element formed quite uniformly five or six per cent of the total population of Indianapolis. After 1876, the per cent rapidly increased, becoming nine per cent in 1879. Something more had to be done for the growing numbers of Negro children. Superintendent Tarbell led in a crusade to aid them. He wished to modify the course of study in the colored schools with the idea that their education should "fit them in the briefest possible time for the essential requirements of future years." He wanted them to be taught moral culture, sense training, esthetic training, hand training. He believed it more important for them to know that a cubic foot of ice weighs fifty-eight pounds than that twenty grains make a scruple, and yet he found that the latter was being taught, but not the former.¹²

The reforms introduced by Superintendent Tarbell were especially valuable for Negro Schools at that time. Many youthful Negroes felt that their newly required liberty and the advantages of education meant license for them. As a result some race riots occurred in Indianapolis. Mr. Tarbell met the challenge. His plan not only gave the Negro education but moral training. He may be called the father of character education in the elementary schools of the city. The new training was a strong pillar which aided the race in the development of a higher citizenship. Negroes received their first lessons in preparing themselves for service and usefulness. Without this, crime would have continued to increase

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

among them. It made it possible instead for children to rise above the status of their parents.

No race can reach the zenith of efficient citizenship without good health. The public elementary schools for Negroes promoted habits conducive to health. William A. Bell, one of the leaders favoring the admittance of Negroes into the public schools, may be called the father of health education in Indianapolis. Prior to the year 1887, when Mr. Bell conducted his crusade, the schools did nothing along this line. As early as 1881, he had stated that, "next to moral character the health of a child is of most importance". The School Board was urged to make provision for the health of the children of the city. Many precautionary measures were taken that pure air and light should be furnished in all school buildings. Playgrounds were extended, and third-story schoolrooms were abandoned as rapidly as possible. Halls and stairways were made wider and doors were arranged to open outwards from rooms into hallways and from buildings to the outside. Attention was given to air space, and proper ventilation was provided.

Health education and sanitation changed the conditions for Negro children while in school, and for adults who attended the night schools. The contrast between the conditions at schoolhouses and in the dingy, dilapidated, unventilated homes of the Negroes was very great. They became dissatisfied and began to feel that they ought to have bigger, better houses. They might have them, if they so desired and labored for them. Their cabins could no longer serve them. Dirt floors and "cat-holes" gradually gave way to floors of wood, and homes with porches and windows came into use.

Mr. Bell printed rules for the care and protection of the eyes of school children, and copies were distributed to the homes of school children.¹³ Many people learned simple ways of preventing the impairment of vision, who had never before heard that attention should be given to the eyes. Since that day health education has been extended to cover every detail of health in the elementary city schools under the direction of Dr. Ocker of the public schools and Dr. Morgan of the Board of Health. The health pillar was the third set up for the Negro in Indianapolis.

¹³ *Idem* for 1880-1881, p. 19.

The last pillar erected over the foundation was the introduction of the teaching of citizenship. This was in 1905, and it has been carried on to the present day. In 1909, Arthur W. Dunn, director of the teaching of civics in the elementary schools of Indianapolis, stated that the aim of civics is to contribute positively to the cultivation of citizenship. The object should be not merely to furnish pupils with information in regard to the machinery of Government. Such information is desirable, but the child should be "impressed with the idea that good citizenship is a matter of the home, of the school, of the street, of business." He should know that "good citizenship is, after all, only efficient membership in the community in all its relations".¹⁴

The teaching of citizenship in the elementary schools has trained the maturing child for service. It has taught the children of both races. To prepare the child for this new aspect of citizenship the schools have provided courses in cooking, sewing, pressing, woodcarving, chair-caning and repairing, millinery, rug weaving, cement making, electricity, shoe cobbling etc. Many adults who attend evening schools also receive the same training. The schools are not only serving the pupils but the neighborhoods as well.

Practical results have followed such teaching. For example, "Better taste in the selection of harmonious and becoming colors has been developed." This is true whether it be a dress, necktie, shirt or paint for the house. Habits of neatness, industry, accuracy, thrift, skill, economy, orderliness, punctuality, self denial, perseverance, cleanliness and politeness have been inculcated. This fourth pillar taught them their rights and their duties. It has taught each member of the race his initial duty to provide for himself and to be of usefulness to community, city, State and Nation. So great is the importance of teaching practical citizenship in the schools that greater emphasis is being placed upon the teaching of this important subject. This is not only true in Indianapolis but in all schools throughout the country. Comparative studies show that America does more of this because of the many different races that she must instruct.

The whole amount of money expended upon the Negro elementary school has been large, but the work the schools started in 1869 was large. The task has been successfully

¹⁴ *Idem* for 1916, p. 168.

carried on. Within the sixty years from 1869 to 1929, the race has been to a great degree transformed from a "herd of undisciplined blacks" to efficient citizens. Within that little space of time, thousands of black children, each possessing an individual capacity to learn and a peculiar need to be met, have been placed in the elementary schools. With little or no educational heritage the primary school has taken them. The first part of the elementary school problem is particularly difficult, especially when children come from ignorant homes. The elementary schools of Indianapolis are noted for an efficient primary system. Miss Nebraska Cropsey was the first trained primary teacher in the city. She was sent by the school board under Mr. Shortridge's administration to the Oswego Normal School in New York to be especially trained for primary work. Her ideas were given to the many Negro primary teachers and they have accomplished much. Miss Fannie Carter began her work in 1874 and is still living. She exemplifies the importance of that part of the elementary school work devoted to preparing individuals for citizenship. Her work is being extended and carried on by many others, including Mrs. S. DesChamp Riley, wife of the writer, who is a primary instructor and critic teacher in the public schools of the city.

The intermediate department of the elementary schools has taken children of the race after being prepared in the primary department. Mrs. Lillian Jones Brown has exerted such civic influence upon her pupils that Miss Laura Donnan states of her: "I can always tell the pupils of Mrs. Brown. So well are they instructed that they make the best pupils in my high school classes and are so polite and courteous. They appear to me to make the best citizens of the city in later life."¹⁵ Miss Donnan has taken pupils and through her "school senate" has endeavored to prepare all of them for higher citizenship. She possesses the soul of a Shortridge and has greatly inspired many Negro youths to be worthwhile citizens.

The departmental grades (seventh and eighth) have also largely contributed to the preparation of Negroes for citizenship. George L. Hayes, who for many years was principal of School No. 17, the only Negro departmental school in

¹⁵ This statement was made to the writer by Miss Donnan.

the city, accomplished much for the race. So well have pupils from his school and other elementary schools of the city been prepared for later life as citizens that even though many have stopped with only an elementary, or part of an elementary, training, they have become a creditable asset to the city.

So well have the elementary schools completed their task that Negro pupils have been admitted to the high schools for fifty-eight years, though the law opposed it. Mr. Shortridge said of this some years ago:

The manner in which the colored children first gained admission to the high schools without the authority of law, I think has never been correctly told. I can easily tell how it occurred. Two or three years after the law of 1869, providing for the education of colored children, was enacted, a few of them had mastered the course of study in the district schools and were prepared to enter the high school. The law, however, provided for their education in separate schools and a high school for a half dozen children was not to be thought of.

There were up then for settlement some difficult questions. Early in the vacation of 1872, I think it was a committee of colored men headed by the Rev. Moses Broyles, a prudent man and a good preacher, came to me to ask what they were to do. Of course, I could not tell them what to do, as the law was clearly against them. The committee was of the opinion that the constitution of the United States ought to admit them, and if it did not, the constitution of the State of Indiana certainly would, as it specifically provided for a system of common schools by the general assembly wherein tuition should be free and equally open to all.

Some of the committee were in favor of bringing suit to compel the authorities to admit the children. Here it occurred to me that we could get at the matter in a better way by placing the burden of excluding them on the shoulders of them who wanted to keep them out, and that we could thus avoid the cost and delay to those who were in favor of admitting them. I said: "Get ready one of your brightest children and send her to me on the first day of school." This they did.

Early in the morning on the opening day of school Mary Alice Rann, a bright, well-dressed girl, came to me and expressed to me a wish to enter the high school. Without asking any questions, I walked with her to the room of the principal, George P. Brown, and without any explanation or request, I said, "Mr. Brown, here is a girl that wishes to enter the high school," and then went back to my work.

Mary was admitted and remained in the high school for four years, and at the end of that time received her diploma. Colored children have been admitted to the school ever since without question, now for more than thirty-five years.

On Thursday following the admission of the girl to the high school J. J. Bingham, editor at the time of the *Daily Sentinel*, and member

of the board of school commissioners, and I were standing in the high school hall, when there came and stood within a few feet of us the girl referred to waiting to ask me some questions, and Mr. Bingham seeing her, said:

"I understand you have a nigger in the high school."

I could only say, "Probably so, and I suppose that is the girl."

At this Mr. Bingham said, "I have a long communication in my pocket now in regard to it."

Then I said, "That is a good place for it; better let it stay in your pocket."

The communication was never published and that was about the last I ever heard of it.¹⁶

This account of Mr. Shortridge is presented to show the effect of the good work of the elementary Negro schools. They prepared Negroes for the high school, college, business professions and labor of many kinds. They have made them efficient to care for the members of their own race. Many leaders of the race are encouraging others to complete their education by making opportunities for them. Many business men and manufacturers of Indianapolis employ extensively the Negroes who come out of the elementary schools of the city.

Clouds of prejudice and obstructions of many kinds against the Negro in Indianapolis have been removed. The educational foundation for the race has been firmly imbedded in the city. The laying of the corner stone was completed in 1866. The four precious pillars of the race have been permanently erected, never to be overthrown. This study does in an encyclopedia or text book, but we have laboriously striven to unfold to our readers the major events and principal characters that have made citizens of the Negro. "Slow moves the pageant of a climbing race." The colored race is still climbing in Indianapolis and the elementary school is aiding its members to plant their feet more firmly upon those levels which make of them better citizens for their community, city, State and our United States of America.

We are now at our journey's end. We have not listed all of the results growing out of the work of the elementary schools, as that would be impossible in a single paper. We could not and have not listed all who aided in building up

¹⁶ *Indianapolis News*, April 18, 1908.

the elementary system of the city. If we have accomplished our aim, our readers now get a glimpse of the new Negro and have acquired an understanding of the struggles that have been necessary to elevate the colored race in Indianapolis. The Negroes of the city are no longer to be considered an inferior race either mentally or morally.