

ON THE FOREFRONT: The Junior No. 1 Stories

The Segregation/
Desegregation of
Trenton Schools:
Hedgepeth-Williams vs
the Trenton Board of
Education



L to R: Mrs. Berline Williams, Robert Queen, Esq., Leon Williams, Mrs. Gladys Hedgepeth, and Janet Hedgepeth



ON THE FOREFRONT: The Junior No. 1 Stories

February 18

Photographing the
Decaying Junior No. 1
by J. Carlos Vargas
(exterior) and Robert
J. Sammons (interior)

February 25

William A Poland,
Architect of
Junior No. 1 and
over 2,000 other
buildings

March 4

Junior No. 1
School Days – a
talk with former
Principal Albert
Williams and
teachers

March 18

The 1916 Polio
Epidemic and the
Building of
Trenton's
Municipal Colony



Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, Perry Street

- African Americans have been an integral part of the history of New Jersey's capital since the Colonel period, when the first Blacks were brought to Trenton as slaves of the early settlers.
- The wills of the most prominent early settlers, Mahlon Stacey (d.1704) and William Trent (d.1724), both included slaves of African descent among their property at the time of their deaths.
- During the early 19th century African Americans residents began forming institutions to serve and support their small community. Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church was one such organizations that has survived to the present.

- Public schools began as education for the poor in 1820, with the State Legislature authorizing townships to raise money by taxation “for the education of such poor children as are paupers...and the children of such poor parents as are, or shall be...unable to pay for schooling the same,”
- The first reference of public schooling in Trenton was reported in a newspaper in 1827: *The township of Trenton, at the late annual town meeting, voted 300 dollars for the schooling of poor children.*
- Trenton’s free public schools began in rented rooms for the education of poor people only.
- The city’s first specifically built school was the **Centre Street School**, later renamed the **Skeleton School** was built in 1844 by Nottingham Township which was annexed to Trenton in 1851,



YWCA – East Hanover Street

- The city established its first school for colored children in a building on E. Hanover Street named “Jackson Hall” in 1832. The building was a gathering place for African Americans for many years.
- By the 1850’s the student population was around 60 children.
- Because of complains about its dilapidated condition, this building, then popularly called “Nightmare Hall” was sold by the city in 1855 for \$21.00 and removed. The Young Women’s Christian Association now occupies the site.



- In 1845 Trenton school trustees urged City Council to establish primary and upper schools for boys and girls as well as colored children.
- The **Higbee Street School** was built in 1857. The schoolhouse partially collapsed twice before its completion. It was so named because that was the name of the street. This was the first public educational institution specifically constructed for the free public education of African American students in Trenton and among the earliest such schools built in New Jersey.
- The community petitioned the Board of Education to have Sarah A. Armstrong (a Black women) as the principal. She remained until her death 1870.



Henry Barnard (1811-1900)



John Thompson Nixon
(1820-1889)

- Henry Barnard was the first commissioner of Education for the United States and publisher of the American Journal of Education. He was a 19th century reformer and to promote harmonious social and civic behavior by revamping the US school system. His principles were used for the school's architecture, curriculum and lessons plans.
- The **Higbee School** was no exception – every student would have their own desk, desks arranged in a row and separate entrances for boys and girls.
- When the street name was changed to Bellevue Avenue, the **Higbee Street School** was changed to the **Nixon School** – named for Judge John T. Nixon.
- John Thompson Nixon was the Judge of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey. He was appointed to the position by President Ulysses S. Grant. He was from Bridgeton, New Jersey.

The Higbee Street School is distinguished among the state's few surviving schools for Black children because of its progressive design. In 1994 the building was deemed part of the National of Register Historic Places.

- In 1872, the Black student population outgrew the facility and they were moved into temporary quarters while the new **Ringold Street School** for Black students was under construction.
- The **Nixon School** became a school for White children.



Bellevue Avenue Colored School
Lincoln School



The King David Lodge No. 15 of Free and Accepted
Masons-Prince Hall Affiliation

- By 1883, the city's Black student population had outgrown the **Livingston School** (formerly the **Ringold Street School**) and a new building was erected at 81 Bellevue Ave, called the **Bellevue Avenue Colored School**.
- The school was build after the New Jersey Legislature passed the School Desegregation Act of 1881, which allowed Black parents the option of enrolling their children in previously White only Schools.
- The school was expanded in 1888 and renamed **Lincoln School** in 1891.
- This building remains an integral part the Black community to this very day, home of The King David Lodge No. 15 of Free and Accepted Masons-Prince Hall Affiliation.



Lincoln School on Bellevue Avenue and baseball on Church Street

This photograph is from an article I found at the Trentoniana at the Trenton Free Public Library. It was taken from the Trenton Times in the Then and Now section by Sally Lane, dated February 17, 1985.

She starts out by saying “one of the drawbacks is the number of subjects I never write about, simply because appropriate pictures don’t come my way. As I have mentioned before, it’s not hard to reconstruct the lives of rich people, who are more often photographed and more often written about than people of lesser means. In Trenton which for a century has been rich in immigrants, we lack the pictures to prove it. While contemporary newspapers routinely carry stories of ethnic events, photographs aren’t wasted on them. And while pictures may well have been taken, their owners don’t think them important enough to donate to the Trentoniana collection of the Trenton Free Public Library.

The picture depicted here was one of such pictures at was actually from at a flea market that bore the words “Field, Church St., Trenton, NJ.”

The article then went on about Lincoln School on Bellevue, which was from the Trenton Times of Saturday, April 17, 1909.

TELEPHONE 245-W

RESIDENCE PHONE 4810

Bondy Director

ROBERT QUEEN

ATTORNEY AT LAW
TRIPLEX BUILDING
9 EAST STATE STREET
TRENTON, N. J.

October 12, 1925.

Mr. Charles A. Green, Gen. Sec'y,

Central Y. M. C. A.,

Trenton, N. J.

Dear Mr. Green:

Some time ago our committee called on the Board of Education with reference to securing Lincoln School for Y. M. C. A. ^{purpose} Rev. John A. White being spokesman for the party. At that time the matter was referred to the committee on building and grounds. Just recently I met a member of that committee and he stated that while they had not reported as yet he could tell me that there was no immediate intention of abandoning Lincoln School nor had they come to any final conclusion as to whether or not they would use it after the new school is ready.

It seems, therefore, that we are losing time waiting for the school proposition to materialize and I would be glad if your committee would consider some other proposition that would tend to lead to quicker results. I am sure that we are ready to go ahead or cooperate as may be best.

Yours respectfully,

Robert Queen

RQ/LBJ

via US Mail

Facts of that article revealed:

- *Lincoln's principal at that time was Spencer P. Irwin. This writer was quite amazed that the article focuses on a black man and he was accorded the same style given to a white man. The caption read "Spencer P. Irvin, Principal of Lincoln School, Working Under Adverse Circumstances but with Real Love for the Cause of Education and Improvement of His People."*
- *Another quote: "If one school in Trenton needs fostering more than another, it is the Lincoln School on Bellevue Avenue devoted exclusively to education of negro children....."*

Mr. Irwin:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • <i>Was in his 26th year of being principal at Lincoln School.</i> | • <i>Son was a physician in Phila. for 5 years – claimed by death.</i> |
| • <i>An educator for 36 yrs. – 10 years at the Harrisburg School – 54 years of age.</i> | • <i>A favorite among the children because of his fatherly interest he takes in them.</i> |
| • <i>Married – wife taught in Camden prior to marriage.</i> | • <i>He was not a resident of Trenton. Traveled to Phila. daily.</i> |

With the opening of Junior No. 1 in 1916

- The **Nixon School** was returned to educating Negro children and the **Nixon and Lincoln Schools** were combined.
- The main building of the **Lincoln School** by order of the Board had been thoroughly remodeled during the summer vacation.
- The School's seventh and eighth graders were to go to the new **Junior No. 1** on Princeton Avenue. This school admitted African American students until the **New Lincoln School** opened in 1924.
- The third through the sixth grade would be at the **Lincoln School** and it was anticipated that 160 pupils would be enrolled.
- The **Nixon School** would have kindergarten through second grade.
- The **Nixon School** would close in 1923 with the opening of the **New Lincoln School** and become a repair shop for the school district in 1925.



The Eclectic Club had rooms in the upper floors of this commercial building at 4-6 Broad Street from c.1877-1915.

- Black residents founded a number of social clubs and service organization, as well several new churches, during the 19th and 20th centuries. One of the most interesting of these groups was the Eclectic Club, founded in 1877 by the city's elite. With rooms in a commercial building on North Board Street, the club hosted social events and guest speakers, such national leaders as Frederick Douglas.
- At the turn of the 20th century, Trenton's African American population numbered 2,158 people. Black residents represented less then three percent of the city's total population up to that point.
- Despite its minority status, the Black community was on the verge of a population explosion of its own. During and after World War I, the Great Migration brought thousands of African Americans from the rural South to the industrial Northeast and urban areas throughout the United States in search of job opportunities and greater freedom. In Trenton, this migration led to substantial increases in the African American population, from 2,500 in 1910 to more than 8,000 in 1930. New residents came from every Southern state, but the largest numbers arrived from Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.



- 1917 the **Carroll Robbins School** on Tyler St., previously the **Hewitt Training School for Teachers**, was opened as **Junior No. 2**.
- Used as **Junior No. 2** until 1925.
- In 1926 the former **Junior No. 2** students were sent to the newly opened **Junior No.4**.



Escher Street School on Jefferson Street

- **Escher Street School** opened in 1917 as a third school for colored students.
- The school would contain 4 class rooms and a kindergarten room larger than any other in the city.
- In 1918 the city buys the former Reister Hall building from Rudolph Kuser for \$12,000
- The school closes in 1923 with the opening of the **New Lincoln School**.

- Dr. Bickett became Superintendent of Schools just after 1919. He was aggressive in planning for the educational system in the city. Especially since the adoption of the plan for Junior High Schools to include grades seven to ninth grade. Within a few years three new schools would open.



New Lincoln School



Arthur T. Long, first Principal
of the New Lincoln School,
1923

- A site of thirty-six acres, on Chambers Street, between Hamilton and Greenwood Avenues, was purchased in 1922 for the location of a new Senior High School.
- The New Lincoln School was erected in 1923, the fourth and final school building constructed exclusively for the education of African American children in Trenton. It is located on North Montgomery Street on a site of four and a half acres.
- Designed by consulting Architect Ernest Sibley and Associates Architect William Slack and Son, the school was Italian Renaissance design.
- The school was built for 1,200 students, it contained both junior and elementary students.
- The first principal to head the school was Arthur T. Long of Indianapolis, Indiana.



Junior No. 3



Junior No. 4

- Then in 1924 **Junior High School No. 3** was built on a site of seven acres plot owned by the city on West State Street and Parkside Avenue.
- In 1926 **Junior High School No. 4** on a site of eight acres on Dayton and Grand Streets.
- By 1928, the **New Lincoln School** could no longer accommodated the city's population of African American children. A ten room addition for elementary for elementary students in the 1930's.

As the Black population grew, community members began to agitate for equal treatment under the law, particularly in the city schools.



Trenton Central High School - 1932

- When the new **Trenton Central High School** opened in 1932, the school accepted both White and Black students, as had its predecessor. Problems arose quickly around the segregated swimming pool.



Trenton Central High School Pool - 1932

Negro pupils were being made “race conscious” by the refusal of athletic officials at the new **Central High School** to permit them to take the prescribed swimming class work with their classes the a Negro delegation presented to the school board on March 3, 1932, two months after the school opened.

Contending that such action would provoke strife and conflict, board members refused to take action. They said they feared it would in time mean the closing of the pool to all students.

“It is a situation over which we have no control.” John P. Dullard told the Negro delegation. “This board cannot regulate public opinion and while the condition is not ideal it is the only practical one. You man only stir up a social war which would do further harm to your people.”

Colored pupils alleged that they were advised directly and indirectly by certain home-room teachers and athletic officials that their period for taking the regular prescribed swimming classes, but on Friday afternoons, during what we understand to know as the instructional period.

This ruling was carried over into the extra-curricular activities of the school, to the extent that colored athletes after competing in athletic events or after training for those events are not permitted to take a plunge in the pool afterwards, as were their white fellow contestants”

Mr. Dullard asserted that he could not see how the colored pupil was being deprived of any of the education advantages.

“As for race consciousness, you know as well as I do that it is something you cannot overcome, “ he added. “Personally, I don’t see the difference in swimming on Wednesday or Friday.”

Attorney Queen replied that “Americanism should be exhibited in this case. We are Americans and we have made sacrifices as well as the white man. Why shouldn’t we be entitled to privileges?”

Dr. Leroy Morries a member of the group who lived on Spring Street challenged the remark, however declaring that “there is a form of segregation in the system which the board condones.”

“You have no redress to the board, for we are governed by public opinion and we can not regulate it, said board member James E. Mitchell.

Attorney Queen asked the board to experiment for a month, allowing Negro pupils to swim with regular classes. “I think you’ll find that you’ll have public opinion behind you to sustain you,” he added.

“It would only stir up conflict and we would have to close down the pool.” Replied William A. Cooley, board president.

In 1933, Black leaders filed a lawsuit by the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to gain equal access to the pool, with Robert Queen as one of the attorneys.

The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Black students. The case was a first step toward desegregating Trenton's public schools.

Trenton Central High School was razed in 2015 and a new building opened in 2020.



Junior No. 2

- Art Deco design, the architects P. L. Fowler Co and Louis S. Kaplan
- Built in 1939 and opened in 1940, it contained both junior high and elementary school students.
- The acting principal was Beekman Terhune for 789 pupils enrolled.
- The building was modern and well equipped.
- Built with Federal Government's PWA (Public Work Authority) assistance during the Great Depression, the building of the school provided much needed jobs for many local workers.



- In 1943 the New Junior High School No. 2 was a White school within the Trenton Public Schools segregated system, and the Lincoln School served the community's African American children.
- The four middle schools (Junior No. 1 – Junior No. 4), were attended exclusively by White students, and were spread throughout the city.
- All Black Students, from all over town were admitted only to Lincoln School. They had to travel from home to and school the best way that they could. Because of poverty, most walked, in all kinds of weather.
- The neighborhood surrounding the school (Junior No. 2) was integrated. The residents in the area were predominantly European immigrant population. Specially since Trenton was such an industrial town.

The Hedgepeth, Williams and Snyder families were part of the neighborhood. Their children Janet, Leon and Delores, had been playmates and classmates through sixth grade. In the fall of 1943, they were all rising seventh graders and applied for admission to **Junior No 2**. Delores was white, was admitted, but Janet and Leon, were turned away by the school secretary. Their mothers appealed the decision, which was first ignored, then turned down by the school principal, then turn down by school superintendent, and finally by the Trenton Board of Education.



L to R: Mrs. Berline Williams, Robert Queen, Esq., Leon Williams, Mrs. Gladys Hedgepeth, and Janet Hedgepeth

- Mrs. Gladys Hedgepeth and Mrs. Berline Williams, filed suit, with local NAACP attorney Robert Queen litigating the case. Mr. Queen discovered the New Jersey Law of 1881 that was never enforced (law that prohibited racism).

- Dr. Paul Loser, the superintendent, proudly testified that **Junior No. 2** had not been built for “Negros” and claimed that “Negros” were better off when separated from Whites’.
- The New Jersey Supreme Court unanimously disagreed! On January 31, 1944, the New Jersey Supreme Court ordered that Trenton Public Schools could not deny enrollment based on race.
- The Hedgepeth and Williams children were subsequently admitted to **Junior No. 2**, and about 200 other African American students also transferred from the Lincoln School to formerly White middle schools in their district.
- The decision served as a legal precedent for the United States Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education decision. This was the beginning of integration of the schools in Trenton, then spread aboard.



- For thirty-eight years the school functioned as one unit. The elementary division served the immediate neighborhood, but there were special classes for the visually impaired and handicapped children who were bused to school.
- In 1977, the elementary school became a separate unit with its own administration. The elementary school was named for Paul Roberson.
- In 1993 Trenton Board of Education honored these ordinary mothers, by renaming Junior No. 2 to Hedgepeth-Williams School.

Through the Hedgepeth and Williams decision, New Jersey required all of its public schools to admit African American and other children of color, thus neutralizing Pressy (Separate but Equal) in all New Jersey public schools, which formed the basis of the United States Supreme Court's Brown decision 10 years later.

Hedgepeth and Williams also influenced the passage of the 1947 State Constitution outlawing discrimination in all public affairs, which outlawed, "Separate but Equal" (Plessy) in all government agencies and in the NJ National Guard, 17 years before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and did the same thing for the rest of the nation.

The 1947 Constitution also granted NJ citizens the right to a thorough and efficient education system; and generated the NJ Law Against discrimination arguably the strongest civil rights law in the Nation; which in turn established the NJ Department of Civil Service and the Department of Civil Rights; and provided the basis for the Discrimination Prohibition Law of 1974, which established Equality in Education Programs (Affirmative Action Programs) facilitating the elimination of discrimination among staff, students and educational programs in all of the State's public schools.



The New Lincoln School

The school was renamed **Junior No. 5** in 1945 when Trenton's schools were desegregated and opened in 1946 with both white and colored students. The principal was Patton J. Hill, an African American, He was one of the nation's first Black principals to serve a school with white students.

- Mr. Hill was from Coffeyville, Kanas.
- He attended Indiana University, A.B., MA 1934, Candidate for Ph.D. at NYU.
- Principal of several schools in West Virginia & Kentucky.
- He was principal at Lincoln School since November 6, 1933, until his retirement in 1958.

During an interview with a newspaper columnist, he was reported to have said his favorite sport was Football. Another question asked was "How do you spend leisure time? He replied, "I'm active in the American Legion and helping children prepare for college".

At the time of integration, he was active with preparing his students for the change.

Our Negro Heritage

Just three hundred and twenty years ago
Came a people from Africa called the
Negro.
They were brought as slaves – powerless-
but still
There was within them the strength and
will
To fight for their freedom in such a way
That they have gained most of it today.
They have proved on the stage and in
other fields too
That they can do as well as any can do.
To prove the truth of what I say,
Here are examples we know today:
George Washington Carver was but a
slave;
But look what a great name in science he
made.
Marian Anderson scrubbed floors and
washed walls;
But now she sings in Carnegie Hall.
Joe Louis, the Brown Bomber-Boy, how he
can hit!
He knocked out Bill Conn with just one
lick.
The Negro has come a long, long way
In order to be what he is today.

- Clara Patillo, 8-1



City Basketball Champs, Junior No. 5 School 1946

First Row, left to right – Joshua Baylor, William Mason, William Kinsey, Jesse Dunn, and Paul Graham

Second Row, left to right – James Way, assistant manager; Harold Rivers, Elijah Sapp, Milton Berry, Clarence Murphy, William James, Ameal Carter, Leonard Williams, Charles Davis, manager, and Coach Gilliam.



Principal Patton J. Hill (center) became the first black principal to head an integrated school in the city after the historic 1943 State Supreme Court Decision to abolish racial segregation in the city. Above, Hill smiles as the Patton Hill Elementary School on East State Street is dedicated in his name.

- An elementary school on East State Street was named for him in 1972, **Patton Hill Elementary School**.
- It is recorded in the Trenton Times (dated 3/1/2003) during an alumnus revisited: Elizabeth Lacy, remembers the day in 1946 when **Junior No. 5** opened its doors to children of all colors. Mr. Hill guided the school through a seamless transition. “He was a peaceful person and not excitable. He had the ability to counsel and mediate. He was a person that demanded respect by his demeanor”.
- **Junior No. 5** elementary school was renamed the **Louis Munoz-Rivera** in 1977, and today the **Luis Munoz Rivera Community Middle School**.

PUPIL ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION
as of 30 September 1972

	White	Black	Spanish	Other	Am. Ind.	% White	% Black	% Spanish	% Other	% Am. Ind.	Total
Jr. #1 Elem.		25	2				93	7			27
Jr. #2 Elem.	310	348	79			42	47	8			737
Jr. #3 Elem.	86	300	6			22	77	1			392
Jr. #4 Elem.											
Jr. #5 Elem.	8	441	42			2	90	8			491
Junior #1	50	980	37	3		5	91	3	1		1070
Junior #2	219	509	60			27	65	8			788
Junior #3	44	834	48	3	2	4	89	5	1	1	931
Junior #4	591	191	104	1	3	66	21	11	1	1	890
Junior #5	13	368	110			3	75	22			491
TCHS	751	2059	189		2	25	68	6		1	3001
TOTAL District	3810	11893	1541	19	8	22	69	9			17271

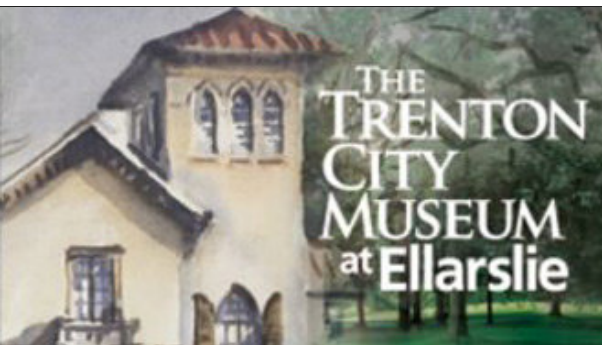
TEACHER ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION
as of 30 September 1972

	White	Black	Spanish	Other		% White	% Black	% Spanish	% Other		Total
Jr. #1 Elem.	1					100					1
Jr. #2 Elem.	21	6				78	22				27
Jr. #3 Elem.	9	2				82	18				11
Jr. #4 Elem.											
Jr. #5 Elem.	8	11				42	58				19
Junior #1	27	29				48	52		1		56
Junior #2	40	9				82	18				49
Junior #3	14	44				24	76				58
Junior #4	49	7		2		85	12		3		58
Junior #5	13	19				41	59				32
TCHS	70	41	1		2	62	37	1			112
TOTAL District	500	286	4	2		62	36	1			792



Ernest Williams is keeping the,
legacy of the Hedgepeth Williams
case alive.

Questions?



ON THE FOREFRONT: The Junior No. 1 Stories

Photographing the
Decaying Junior No. 1



J. Carlos Vargas
(exterior)



Robert J. Sammons
(interior)

