

E.S. Doty School

I. CONTEXT:

Since McKinney's early settlement, the African American community has been foundational to the city's rapid development as a leading economic center in one of Texas' wealthiest counties. The first Black Americans to settle Collin County were forcibly brought to Texas by their enslavers in the 1840s. By 1864, about 12% of Collin County's residents were enslaved – more than 1,500 enslaved Black Americans were recorded in the county's tax rolls that year.¹ Just three years later in 1867, following abolition, 287 Black men, the majority of eligible Black voters in Collin county, registered to vote.² By 1870, Reverend Jacob Chamberlain had built the first schoolhouse for African American children. However, the school was burned by a mob of arsonists in 1870.

The school was reconstructed in a new location east of the McKinney town center and renamed the Frederick Douglass School. In 1930, the school burned down again, though the cause is not documented. It was rebuilt shortly thereafter in the same Throckmorton Street location and renamed for longtime educator and school principal, Edward Sewell "E.S." Doty. Following the end of legal segregation in 1965, former E.S. Doty students and educators became the first to integrate McKinney ISD. The former E.S. Doty School building remains and is now home to Holy Family School.

II. OVERVIEW:

Reverend Jacob Chamberlain is credited with constructing the first school for African American students in Collin County sometime between 1866 and 1870. Rev. Chamberlain was born into slavery in Tennessee in 1798. He was brought to Texas by his former enslaver,

¹ Jeanette Bickley Bland, *African-Americans in the Early Records of Collin County, Texas* (1989), p. 12-23.

² Bland, p. 42.

Joseph Fisher, before being purchased by Joe Dixon, and later the Wilmeth family for a sum of \$400. The Wilmeth's were staunch confederates, and entrusted the care of the Wilmeth property, women, and children with Rev. Chamberlain while the men were away fighting for the confederacy. Rev. Chamberlain became a free man sometime between 1862-1865 when Elder Wilmeth awarded him freedom in exchange for protecting the Wilmeth homestead. Sometime between 1866-1870, as a man in his 70s, Rev. Chamberlain built the Freedman's School with the help of his friend Charlie Hubbard.³ After completing construction, both Chamberlain and Hubbard worked there as teachers.

At the time of the Freedman's School's construction, a significant number of confederate families lived in Collin County. Knowing this, Chamberlain and Hubbard purposely sought out an obscure location to build the school so as not to draw any unwanted attention. Nevertheless, their efforts to avoid causing offense were in vain, and the school was burned by a mob of arsonists in 1870.⁴ It was rebuilt shortly thereafter in a new location on Throckmorton Street in the historically Black Lewisville neighborhood.

At the time of its reconstruction in 1870, the former Freedman's School was renamed the Frederick Douglass School for the famed civil rights leader and American abolitionist. Though housed in McKinney, the school served Black students from a number of surrounding cities - Black children from Plano, Celina, Josephine, and others bussed in from miles away to receive an education there. In 1888, Professor Edward Sewell "E.S." Doty began teaching and later became the principal of Frederick Douglass School after graduating from Prairie View A&M. During his 50-year tenure, Professor Doty and his staff of dedicated educators developed a curriculum rivaling that of the handsomely funded white schools, secured facilities

³ Jesse R. Thompson, *Reconstruction in Collin County, Texas, 1865-1876* (University of North Texas, 2015), p. 41.

⁴ "Dastardly Incendiarism-Freedmen's School-house Burned." *McKinney Messenger*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Ed. 1; June 18, 1870, p. 2.

improvements with a fraction of the funding, and graduated many students that would go on to be very successful in their chosen careers. Beyond his contributions to the education of Black children in Collin County, Professor Doty was active in the McKinney community with membership to the local Freemasons chapter, PTA, and McKinney Humane Society. He lived at 607 Railroad Street in the Lewisville neighborhood and maintained membership at St. James CME, one of the oldest and longest-standing Black church congregations in McKinney.

In 1930, the Douglass School burned again and was rebuilt by the Works Progress Administration in 1938. Students were taught at local churches until the new brick building was constructed and at last renamed “E.S. Doty School” for the longtime principal and professor. E.S. Doty School housed all 12 grades and was renowned for its high-quality education. During his 50-year tenure at the school, Professor Doty improved the curriculum and education so significantly that any student who graduated from E.S. Doty would be automatically admitted to any HBCU without having to take an entrance exam.⁵ When Professor Doty retired, Mr. John W. Fenet Jr. became the principal of E.S. Doty School.

Principal Fenet continued the important work of Reverend Chamberlain and Professor Doty by securing additional funding from the city and fellow citizens for the purpose of improving the school. During his time as principal, Mr. Fenet was able to have sidewalks built around the school, moved old army barracks to the campus for use as a cafeteria and lunchroom, and created new spaces for programs at E.S. Doty like a woodshop, a science laboratory, a gymnasium, and a separate Kindergarten wing situated directly behind the main school building. Principal Fenet is the namesake of Fenet St, directly south of the school’s old location.

⁵ Colin Kimball, *James Webb Throckmorton A Timeline of his Public Service and Contributions to the Development of Collin County, Texas* (Collin County Historical Commission, 2020), p. 15.

All of these men realized the importance of a good education and worked tirelessly to provide an education for the Black community – even when that meant pulling from their own pocket. And their investment did not go to waste – a number of E.S. Doty alumni attended college and later returned to McKinney to teach at E.S. Doty before becoming some of the first Black educators to integrate MISD. E.S. Doty School would remain in operation until the end of legal segregation. The last class of E.S. Doty School graduated in 1966, and the school closed shortly thereafter, but the legacy of E.S. Doty continues to have a ripple effect on the city of McKinney to this day.

III. HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Originally opening as the Freedman’s School in 1870, E.S. Doty School was the first school built for African American students in Collin County. The original construction was funded entirely by the community. Neighbors chipped in money to purchase heavy timber logs, and another group of volunteers hauled the heavy timber logs a distance of five miles or more to the school site. Since its inception, E.S. Doty School has anchored McKinney’s Black community to the Lewisville neighborhood. During a time when the city did not recognize communities of color east of the train tracks, spaces like E.S. Doty School became important points of connection and ongoing community organization.

In addition, the school graduated several important local educators, famous athletes, civil rights activists, and community leaders. E.S. Doty alum Clemon Daniels graduated valedictorian and went on to play for the Oakland Raiders from 1961-1967. He played a key role in the successful 1965 AFL boycott of playing games in New Orleans due to racism experienced by black players.⁶ Weldon Berry moved to the Riverside neighborhood in Houston, Texas after

⁶ Tom LaMarre. “Inside the Raiders, 1965 AFL All-Star Game Boycott.” *SI.com*, Sports Illustrated, March 22, 2021.

graduating from E.S. Doty and worked with the NAACP to integrate the city.⁷ Mr. Leonard Evans (Class of 1942), Mrs. Iola Lee Davis Malvern (Class of 1944), Mr. Reuben Johnson (Class of 1944), and Mr. Jesse McGowen (Class of 1959) graduated from E.S. Doty School, later taught at E.S. Doty, were then among the first Black educators to integrate McKinney ISD, and now each have McKinney schools named for them.

Today, the former E.S. Doty School building is inhabited by Holy Family School - another landmark for McKinney education in its own right. Although E.S. Doty closed in 1966, the site continues to be an important center of community history for the city and county.

⁷ Jon Schwartz. Interview with Weldon H. Berry, November 13, 1985. University of Houston Libraries Audio Video Repository, University of Houston, https://av.lib.uh.edu/media_objects/x059c7354.

IV. ADDITIONAL SOURCES:

Beth Bentley & Molly Brewer. "Black History of McKinney." Vimeo, August 23, 2019.

<https://vimeo.com/355643124?fl=pl&fe=sh>

"Schools for the Freedmen." *McKinney Messenger*, Vol. 14, No. 49, Ed. 1; April 30, 1870, p. 2.

Tonya Fallis. "Black History of McKinney, Texas." City of McKinney GIS Department, February 4, 2020. <https://arcg.is/0aybye>