

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF A BLACK LAND GRANT COLLEGE:
THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, EASTERN SHORE, 1886-1970

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CHAPTER I

THE NEGRO ACADEMY

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, a small school for the education of Negroes was established in the town of Princess Anne on Maryland's Eastern Shore. As an institution serving "the youth of Maryland of the colored race," its evolution to full-fledged status as a branch campus of the University of Maryland depicts the problems, struggles, and successes faced by a black school in the American South.¹ Throughout its history the school in Princess Anne underwent changes in name, status, and educational philosophy. It responded to the prevailing political, economic, and social forces of its times. During its first quarter century the school managed to survive, but by attempting to achieve both literary and industrial aims it succeeded in neither.

Just north of Princess Anne was a parcel of land with a colonial dwelling on it, named Olney. Built in 1798 by Ezekiel Haynie, a physician and surgeon in the Continental Army, Olney was a large Georgian mansion that had deteriorated over the years. The property was sold to various families

¹Princess Anne Academy Charter, December 31, 1890, University Collection, University of Maryland, Eastern Shore Library, Princess Anne, Maryland.

until it was bought in 1886 by John A. B. Wilson, a white minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who was serving in Princess Anne since 1832.² The founding of the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore is traceable to the acquisition of Olney, first under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Black education in Maryland in the post-Civil War era received practically no support from the state legislature. Those schools that did exist were operated by Protestant church denominations. The Methodists were particularly active in this regard by channeling funds through an organization called the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People. The Association provided teachers to man the Freedmen's Bureau schools that were set up in the counties in the period 1866-1868.³ In Somerset County, the first public school for Negroes at this time was established in a black Methodist church. Shortly after opening for classes, the school was burned by an angry mob of whites who feared that education would ruin blacks for field work and undermine the racial caste system.⁴

Black Methodists, particularly those at the Metropolitan Methodist Church at Princess Anne saw education as a way of overcoming racial aggression in Somerset County.

²Doris Maslin Cohn, "The Haynie Letters," Maryland Historical Magazine, XXVI (June, 1941), p. 2.

³William A. Low, "The Freedmen's Bureau in the Border States," Richard C. Curry, ed., Radicalism, Racism and Party Realignment: The Border States During Reconstruction,

⁴George R. Bentley, A History of the Freedmen's Bureau, (New York, 1974), p. 179.

way of overcoming racial aggression in Somerset County. Significantly, the congregation had been strong even in slavery times and had contained a large number of the free blacks of the county.⁵ The Waters family, free black farmers, and log cutters were active in working for the educational improvement of their race during the antebellum period. After the war, John Waters, the pastor of the Metropolitan Methodist Church, would be involved in the establishment of a college for Negroes on the Eastern Shore of Maryland for the sons and daughters of former slaves.⁶ Such was the background for the founding of Princess Anne Academy.

In 1867 the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church established the Centenary Biblical Institute in Baltimore as a school for the "higher" learning of Negroes.⁷ The Institute attracted many students and due to overcrowded conditions, the school sought new quarters. An additional building was obtained through the aid of John F. Goucher, a trustee.⁸ Within a few years applications again exceeded available space, and the school was forced to refuse admission to prospective students.⁹ At this time John Wilson was

⁵Robert W. Todd, Methodism of the Peninsula, (Philadelphia, 1886), p. 173.

⁶"70th Anniversary, Maryland State College Magazine," (The Salisbury Advertiser Press, 1957), p. 5.

⁷Annual Report of the Freedmen's Aid Society, Methodist Episcopal Church, (Baltimore, 1869), pp. 8-9.

⁸Ibid., 1879, p. 11.

⁹Minutes of the Session of the Delaware Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, (Baltimore, 1886), p. 33.

transferred out of Princess Anne to the Dover Delaware district pulpit. He contacted the Centenary Biblical Institute to deed his land for Negro education.¹⁰

While a plan for a Negro school in Princess Anne was well-intentioned and progressive, the response of the white community in Somerset County was less than enthusiastic. In the late 1880's the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland remained relatively untouched by the boom of America's industrial forces. Somerset County was a rural area of small farms and villages. Life was static; heritage and family defined an individual's social status. The relationships between the white residents and the Negroes were also clearly delineated. In custom and law Somerset County upheld white supremacy. Somerset whites had reacted to the end of slavery with bitterness and apprehension. The free Negro had always been feared in the county and community leaders quickly developed alternatives such as forced apprenticeships, black codes, and segregation that would keep the Negro in a subordinate position in the post-Civil War era.¹¹ Believing that education would alter prevailing social arrangements, Somerset County Commissioners spent a scant \$89 yearly on black education.¹² The idea of land being sold for use by Negroes for educational purposes was met with hostility.

¹⁰Land Office Records, Somerset County, 1886, IV, p. 309.

¹¹William A. Low, "The Establishment of Maryland State College," Charles B. Clark, ed., The Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia, (New York, 1950), II, pp. 749-750.

¹²Annual Report on the Public Schools of Maryland for 1871, (Annapolis, 1872), p. 31.

John Wilson was enlightened in his racial attitudes. His friendship with Joseph Robert Waters, the black minister at the Metropolitan Methodist Episcopal Church in the Delaware Conference who promoted the idea of a school in Princess Anne, was unusual given the racial etiquette of the period. Waters and Wilson worked together in founding the school. They agreed that Olney was the logical site, and Wilson purchased the land in June of 1886.¹³ F. Maslin Frysinger, president of the Centenary Biblical Institute, and John F. Goucher traveled to Princess Anne to view the property. "On August 24, [1886], Olney and its sixteen acres was deeded by Wilson to the Centenary Biblical Institute for \$2000.¹⁴"

Olney served as the chief building of the campus. It housed the administration, principal's office and residence, classrooms, dining hall, and dormitory. (The school opened on September 13, 1886 with nine students in attendance.) Their first task was to clear the land and repair Olney which had over the years deteriorated into a granary used by local farmers. By the end of the first year, thirty seven students, a majority from Somerset County, were enrolled at the school, then commonly referred to as the Delaware Conference Academy.¹⁵ Financial support for the academy was funnelled through the

¹³Low, "The Establishment of Maryland State College," op. cit., p. 750.

¹⁴Land Office Records, op. cit.

¹⁵Low, op. cit., p. 751.

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Centenary Biblical Institute and the Delaware Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Delaware Conference consisted of the congregations of Negro Methodists along the east coast from New York to the southern end of the Delmarva peninsula. Once the school in Princess Anne was opened, the Delaware Conference promoted and supported its programs wholeheartedly.

(In 1888 board members of the Delaware Conference recognized the growing need for industrial education at the academy and authorized "the enlargement of the Industrial Department at the Delaware Conference Academy to include carpentering (sic), painting and dressmaking."¹⁶ By 1891 enrollments numbered eighty five students, fifty four men and thirty one women, ranging from eight to thirty three years of age. The school year lasted for thirty six weeks but the average attendance was twenty weeks for men and eighteen weeks for women. Twenty men were taking courses in the agricultural department.¹⁷ Except for farm and garden work, students were required to provide their own tools.¹⁸ All pupils had to participate daily in manual work projects on the campus. Certificates of graduation were granted to students completing three years instruction in one branch of

¹⁶The Morgan College Bulletin, (Baltimore, 1937),
p. 20.

¹⁷Bernard C. Steiner, History of Education in Maryland, (Washington, 1894), p. 331.

¹⁸Catalogue of the Centenary Biblical Institute for 1888-1889, (Press of Centenary Biblical Institute, Princess Anne).

the industrial department as well as to those in the liberal arts and teacher training programs. The school also held summer sessions which it advertised as a "miniature Chatauqua" whereby teachers could "combine recreation and study."¹⁹

(Henry E. Alvord, president of the Maryland Agricultural College and familiar with the work of the Academy, wrote in his 1891 annual report that Princess Anne "is admirably managed, is doing most creditable work, and promises to be the foundation for great practical usefulness in the future.")

Alvord recommended that two buildings be constructed. An industrial building is needed, Alvord wrote, "to accommodate shops and storage for the departments of smithing, wheelwrighting, carpentry, painting, shoemaking, and tailoring besides shed room for brickmaking and masonry." In addition, the female department "should have a building for its entire use, as study rooms, dormitories and quarters for instruction in domestic arts." Alvord concluded his report by stating that "the progress and usefulness of this school will be greatly retarded until these two necessary buildings can be provided."²⁰

While teachers and administrators worked to make the Academy grow and prosper, important political events on the national level were changing the direction and purpose of black education. By the 1890's the early optimism, energy,

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Steiner, op. cit.