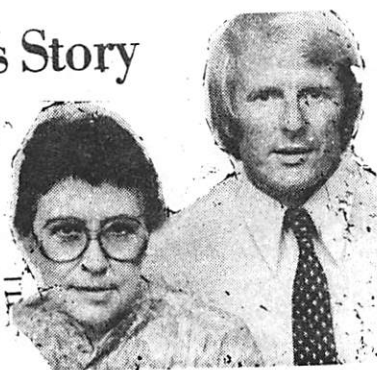


# South Carolina's Story

The making of a state



BY LOUISE PETTUS  
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Real education for South Carolina blacks did not begin until after the Civil War.

Two deteriorating buildings off Cemetery Street in Chester are all that remain of one of the first facilities for black education in the upcountry. It began in 1866, when Miss E.E. Richmond came from New York to Chester and opened a school in a log cabin.

The next summer she was joined by Miss Caroline Kent of New Jersey. On the second floor of a large storage building, the two young women established a day and night school.

Besides education, religion was also practiced in the school and black ministers were invited to preach.

In the fall of 1869, the Board of Home Missions of the New York Presbyterian Church sent the Rev. Samuel Loomis to the South Carolina upcountry with instructions to establish schools and churches among free blacks. After surveying the scene, he chose Chester as the most likely spot, since Miss Kent and Miss Richmond had already established a school there.

Soon after the arrival of Loomis in Chester, a church was organized and schoolwork began with Miss Kent and Miss Loomis as teachers.

In 1869, both the school and church were transferred to the Freedman's Department of the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church. Loomis greatly admired David Brainerd, an American missionary who did pioneering work among the Indians of Massachusetts, and so the school was named Brainerd Missionary School.

Brainerd Institute proved to be a forerunner and a pioneering institution. By 1886 there were only five high schools for black youth in South Carolina. Brainerd was the oldest and largest.

## First Upcountry Black School In Log Cabin

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The curriculum resembled the educational offerings of today. English and math were taught, as well as courses in home economics, vocational training and music. The curriculum eventually included two years of college and religious instruction.

In the early 1900s an official of the school described its purpose: "Its design is not only to fit young men and women for college and the seminary, but to give those who wish a chance to receive a good academic education . . . and to give our pupils such a religious, moral and mental training as would fit them to go out and build homes in which God is worshipped, purity and morality, honored, and industry, thrift and self-respect constantly upheld."

Males were taught not only skills in various trades but also "the true dignity of honorable labor." Female students were introduced to "all the branches of housework — cooking, laundry work and sewing."

Samuel Loomis remained associated with the school until 1892, when he resigned his position as principal. John S. Marques and his wife assumed his place.

The school had several sites before it finally settled into its final location. As the school grew, dormitories and additional buildings were added.

Students came from a number of states. Many graduates became doctors, ministers, school teachers and other professionals.

The buildings of the school have served different purposes over the years — cultural and social as well as academic. Space has been used, for example, as a lodge hall for the American Legion. A number of families have held reunions and professional organizations have sponsored seminars. The school developed a good working relationship with Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, N.C.

Brainerd closed its doors in 1939, mainly because the role it filled in educating blacks had been taken over by the public schools.

There have been community efforts to preserve the historic structure. In early 1980, the Brainerd Institute Club began to seek funding. A testimonial banquet was held on June 27, 1980 at the Chester County War Memorial Building. It is hoped the efforts of the Brainerd Institute will be successful.