

# The birth of Brainerd Institute

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## ■ School opened to meet blacks' educational needs

Immediately following the Civil War, a number of missionary-teachers from Northern states came to the South to set up schools for emancipated blacks.

Liberated blacks of all ages became eager pupils in all sorts of housing, ranging from log cabins on isolated plantations to abandoned properties in towns.

Brainerd Institute in Chester began in 1866 as a log cabin school on Brawley Plantation, north of Chester. It began in response to a request by a Mr. Harris to an agency of the national Presbyterian church to send a teacher to open what was called the County Parochial School.

Miss E.E. Richmond of New York was the first teacher. The next year, she was joined by Caroline Kent of New Jersey. The two located larger quarters in the town of Chester and called their school Chester Mission School.

In 1869, the Rev. Samuel Loomis was sent by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions to locate a suitable place for a first-class boarding school that would eventually prepare students for college.

Loomis chose the school conducted by Richmond and Kent, kept them as teachers and expanded. He renamed the school Brainerd Institute in honor of his friend David Brainerd, a missionary among the Indians.

Brainerd Institute, which was coeducational from the beginning, was moved to a building in Chester called the Old Commissary. By 1882, that site had been outgrown.

The 10-acre De Graffenreid Place, near the railroad, was purchased and a frame building constructed. Over the years, additional buildings were erected and the student body grew.

In 1913, there were 10 grades, with 132 elementary students and 43 secondary students. There were nine teachers, seven of whom were white. The campus had grown to 21 acres.

From the beginning, there was religious instruction, and daily chapel was a requirement for all students. Chester old-timers still recall Brainerd students marching and singing hymns on their way to Carmel Presbyterian Church on Walnut Street.

The curriculum included English, French, German, mathematics, science, music, home eco-



Nearby  
history

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nomics and industrial arts. In the 1920s, when the school was at its height, it became a four-year high school. In 1933, Presbyterian records showed Brainerd to be an accredited school with a good library staffed by a trained librarian.

As public schools became more readily available for black students in their home communities, a dormitory school setting attracted fewer students. In the mid-1930s, Brainerd became a two-year teacher training institution. The last class entered in 1940, and the school permanently closed following the spring commencement of 1941.

Among Brainerd Institute's distinguished graduates were:

■ Mansel Philip Hall — a native of Chester County who became a Baptist preacher and teacher, and was the first president of Friendship Normal and Industrial College in Rock Hill.

■ Robert James Boulware — a Fairfield County native who attended Brainerd's elementary school and later graduated from Biddle University (now Johnson C. Smith) in Charlotte.

Professor Boulware became a highly successful president of Clinton Junior College in Rock Hill in 1891.

■ Thomas Henry Ayers — a native of Winnsboro who graduated from Biddle University and studied at the Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, N.J. He remained in Chester as pastor of Carmel Presbyterian Church and was active in community affairs.

■ Philip T. White — a native of Chester and principal of Fort Mill Graded School.

He became grand orator of the Masons of South Carolina and editor of their official newspaper, The Rock Hill Messenger.

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