

1994

Ringin Up A School: Mary McLeod Bethune's Impact on Daytona

Audrey Thomas McCluskey



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

McCluskey, Audrey Thomas (1994) "Ringin Up A School: Mary McLeod Bethune's Impact on Daytona," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 73 : No. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol73/iss2/6>

RINGING UP A SCHOOL: MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE'S IMPACT ON DAYTONA

by AUDREY THOMAS MCCLUSKEY

The limited scholarly attention given to Mary McLeod Bethune has focused either on her pioneering efforts to integrate the federal bureaucracy during the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt or on her equally trailblazing work in the black women's club movement.¹ To be sure, historians have recognized Bethune as one of this country's most important educators, but this critical aspect of her career remains imperfectly understood. This is especially true of the school that she founded for women in 1904, which became the coeducational liberal arts institution Bethune-Cookman College.

Bethune's work as a young, audacious African-American woman, determined to bring education to rural, economically impoverished black girls and their families, was in step with the efforts of national black leaders such as Booker T. Washington. Her early emphasis on domestic science and skills suited to the existing labor market reveals Washington's influence on her. Although she broadened her view of the purpose of education, she once stated that the Tuskegee Institute president's writings were "a second Bi-

Audrey Thomas McCluskey is assistant professor of Afro-American Studies, Indiana University.

1. B. Joyce Ross, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the Administration of the National Youth Administration: A Case Study of Power Relationships in the Black Cabinet of Franklin Delano Roosevelt," *Journal of Negro History* 40 (January 1975), 1-28; Elaine M. Smith, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Youth Administration," in *Clio Was a Woman: Studies in the History of American Women*, ed. Mabel E. Deutrich and Virginia C. Purdy (Washington, 1980), 149-77. Since there is, to date, no scholarly biography of Bethune, these two articles provide the most complete account of her years as a Washington bureaucrat and presidential adviser. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis's *Lifting As They Climb* (Washington, 1933), a nonscholarly collage of official documents and commentaries, shows Bethune's impact on the NYA. Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex In America* (New York, 1984), portrays Bethune as a conciliatory administrator whose passion for improving the lot of black people, especially women, guided her organizational and political activities.

ble to me."² When she opened her school in Daytona, she followed his exhortation to blacks to "cast down your buckets" where you are.³

Her initiatives in Florida also place her within the broad spectrum of the racial uplift ideology that so engaged educated African Americans during the early 1900s. For black women of the middle class, the fervor to uplift was infused with a desire to enhance the image of their sex. Bethune and her counterparts in the growing black women's club movement—women's club president Mary Church Terrell, school founders Nannie Burroughs and Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and others—wanted to acquit black women of the scurrilous charge of immorality that resulted from their sexual exploitation as slaves. School founders such as Bethune sought to provide black girls with "usable" skills that would help them meet financial obligations to their families while rebutting charges of immorality.

When Mary McLeod Bethune moved to Daytona in 1904 at the age of twenty-nine to open the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, she vowed to do "the greatest good for the greatest number."⁴ Having failed earlier in a similar effort in the nearby town of Palatka, the economic promise Daytona offered attracted her to the town. The lack of financial resources in Palatka made her aware that more than passion and commitment were required to build a school. The flock of wealthy Northerners who wanted to spend their winters in the little village where "the tepid and saline waters make bathing a luxury at any season" was an important consideration in her move.⁵

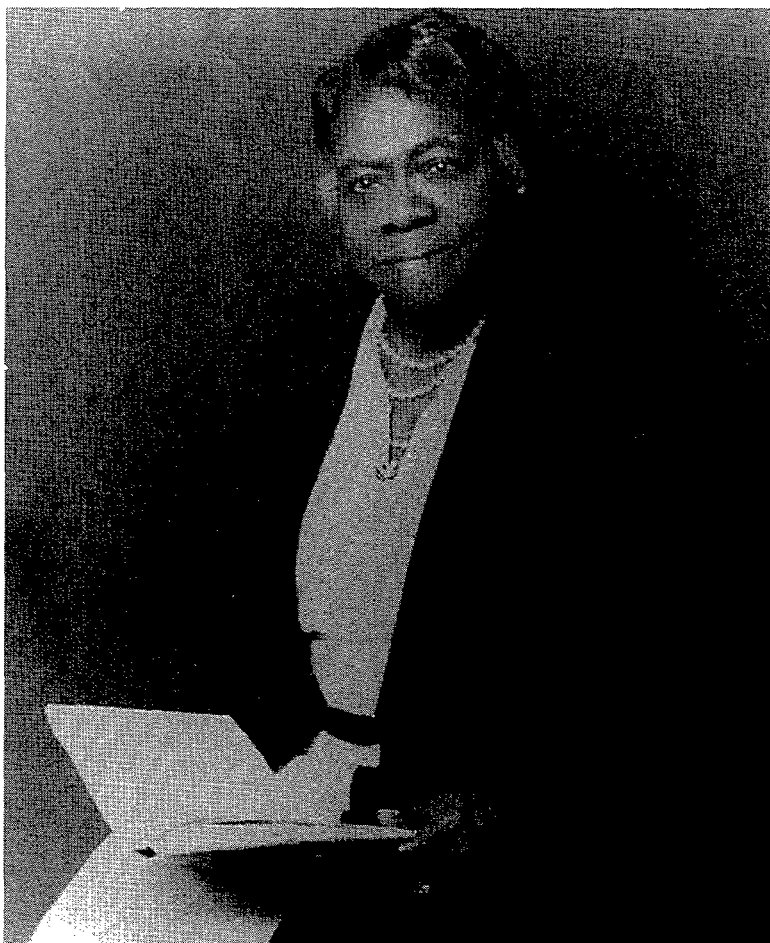
A new railroad, the Florida East Coast Railway, also attracted Bethune to the Daytona area. She knew that Henry Flagler had constructed a line extending through Daytona to Miami. A railroad promised economic prosperity, and that prospect also lured black workers and their families. "Those children need a real school, and

2. Mary McLeod Bethune, "Faith That Moved a Dump Heap," in *Who: The Magazine about People* (June 1941), also in Mary McLeod Bethune Papers, Amistad Research Center, Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereinafter, MMBP, ARC).

3. This sentence is a key line in Washington's famous Atlanta Compromise speech of 1895, which called for black self-help as a way to encourage racial harmony in the racially polarized South.

4. Bethune, "Faith That Moved a Dump Heap," 34.

5. Helen W. Ludlow. "The Bethune School," *The Southern Workman* 41 (March 1912), 144-54, quote on 144.



Mary McLeod Bethune. *Photograph reproduced from Patricia and Fred McKissack, Mary McLeod Bethune (Chicago, 1992.)*

I have come to serve them," Bethune said.⁶ Conditions in the area ignited her passion for uplift: "I found dense ignorance and meager educational facilities and racial prejudice of the most violent type."⁷

6. Interview with Mary McLeod Bethune, n.d., Mary McLeod Bethune Papers, Bethune-Cookman College Archives, Daytona Beach, Florida (hereinafter, MMBP, BCCA)

7. Bethune, "Faith That Moved a Dump Heap," 34.

As a native of the South, Bethune had witnessed the psychological and physical devastation of racial violence near her home in Mayesville, South Carolina. She had also lived in Concord, North Carolina, where she attended the all-female Scotia Seminary, a school that prepared black girls to be teachers and skilled service workers. Her formal education ended after a two-year stint at the evangelical Moody Bible Institute in Chicago where she constituted one half of the black student population. A teaching apprenticeship under Lucy Craft Laney, founder of Haines Institute in Augusta, Georgia, persuaded her that teaching, not missionary work in Africa, was her calling. Bethune later praised Laney and acknowledged the instrumental role she played in her decision to focus on the plight of black females.⁸ Her experience among whites convinced her that there were alternatives to racial hatred and violence. This confluence of circumstances underwrote Bethune's attempt to found a school in the heart of the small Florida town of Daytona.

At the turn of the century, when Bethune arrived in Daytona, the black population lived in a closely confined section of town devoid of street lights, sidewalks, and basic sanitation facilities.⁹ Schooling for black children was rudimentary and haphazard. Throughout the state, public support for black schools lagged far behind that of whites. Black students received fewer instructional hours, and the condition of most black schools was described in the 1912 state of Florida biennial report on public instruction as "dilapidated." Black teachers earned less than white teachers, and only about 60 percent of black children ever enrolled in school. The state spent \$11.50 a year for the education of each white child but only \$2.64 per black child.¹⁰ In counties with black schools the curriculum stressed manual or industrial education, reputedly for its value in producing a dependable and pliant work force.¹¹ By 1904 the town of Daytona had no viable school system for blacks.

8. In several of her speeches Bethune referred to Laney as a "pioneer" and a "trail-blazer" in the struggle of black women.

9. Ludlow, "Bethune School," 144.

10. State of Florida, *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction* (Tallahassee, 1912), 22.

11. August Meier, "The Vogue of Industrial Education," *The Midwest Journal* 7 (Spring 1955), 250.

There was one kindergarten that had been started by a black woman with the support of white club women.¹²

Support from white club women was also instrumental in Bethune's success. Dora Maley, a prominent local citizen and member of the exclusive Palmetto Women's Club, reported that she was the first to assist Bethune by "emptying out the contents of [her] change purse" after a chance meeting in a grocery store. Maley was so impressed with Bethune's plans to start a school that she took the news to her fellow club members. She also convinced her brother-in-law to allow Bethune to use, rent-free, one of the shacks that he owned in the black section of town.¹³ Bethune wooed other members of the white establishment in Daytona by asking influential citizens to serve on her board of trustees. Her efforts were generally met with a favorable response from local officials. The mayor of Daytona, in a 1931 letter, praised Bethune's work as "outstanding" and urged "public spirited men and women" to assist her.¹⁴ The Ku Klux Klan took exception, however, and marched on her school in 1920.¹⁵

Despite the presence of the Klan and strict segregation, Daytona had a reputation for being relatively tolerant on race issues. Unlike many towns in the deep South, the early white settlers of Volusia County were mostly Northerners—many from states with strong abolitionist traditions, such as Ohio and New York—who brought with them more moderate racial views. The city founder, Matthius Day, Jr., was a transplanted Ohioan.¹⁶ Former slaves also settled in the area, attracted by the promise of free homesteads in exchange for work at a lumber company that had ties with the Freedmen's Bureau. When the company failed, a significant number of blacks stayed in the area, working in a variety of jobs, including farming and semiskilled labor. Resourceful and ambitious, some of the black settlers were also Civil War veterans.

12. Dora E. Maley to unknown, March 17, 1955, letter on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Bethune-Cookman College, Mary McLeod Bethune file, Halifax Historical Society, Daytona Beach, Florida.

13. This version of events is contradicted by Bethune, who stated in an undated interview that a man named John Williams owned the house she occupied. See Interview with Bethune, n.d., MMBP, BCCA.

14. B. B. Baguette to B. N. Loving (Bethune's personal secretary), November 24, 1931, MMBP, ABC.

15. "Personal Impressions of A Great Woman by One of Her Students," undated manuscript, MMBP, BCCA.

16. T. E. Fitzgerald, *Volusia County, Past and Present* (Daytona Beach, 1937), 99-100.

Yet Daytona was no oasis of positive race relations. By the early 1900s there was an influx of native white Southerners who brought with them a more virulent form of racism. Blacks were banned from the beaches, and racial laws now entered the city codes. Although African Americans labored as service workers for the new, sprawling, tourist-linked ocean front developments, well into the 1950s laws required black servants to be “back to the West side of the [Halifax] River by sunset.”¹⁷

The developing tourist industry and new railroad encouraged continuing immigration of both white and black laborers at the turn of the century. Competition for jobs increased, causing further racial polarization. Daytona grew steadily, from a population of 1,690 in 1900 to over 3,500 ten years later.¹⁸ Blacks comprised over 50 percent of that number. Whites responded to this changing demography by fortifying racial boundaries. When Bethune arrived in 1904, segregation was an entrenched reality. Nevertheless, the city developed a progressive image. Blacks could vote in Daytona while many other southern cities were erecting elaborate schemes of disfranchisement.

Bethune's efforts to found the institution that was to become Bethune-Cookman College thus took place in a distinctive community, the nature of which is suggested by a variety of anecdotes about the school's origin.¹⁹ In addition to several versions of the story about the \$1.50 that Bethune reportedly used to launch her dream, folklore has it that a local minister gave Bethune an old fire engine bell and told her to “go ring up you a school.”²⁰ This bestowed a spiritual as well as communal blessing on her endeavor. Another version holds that Bethune approached John Williams, a carpenter and one of the few black property owners in the area, with her plan to turn his small two-story frame house into a school. At first he was reluctant: “I'm not thinking about turning my house into a school house!” By the time Bethune finished her talk about

17. Untitled, uncatalogued manuscript, MMBP, BCCA.

18. Fitzgerald, *Volusia County, Past and Present*, 191.

19. In 1923, under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Bethune school merged with Cookman Institute of Jacksonville to become the coeducational Bethune-Cookman Collegiate Institute. The all-male Cookman Institute was founded in 1872 and named for Alfred Cookman, a white minister from New Jersey. See Sheila Y. Flemming, “Bethune-Cookman College,” in *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine (Brooklyn, 1993), I, 127-28.

20. Untitled, undated document, MMBP, BCCA.

being partners in a “new adventure for our people,” Williams supposedly agreed to rent the house to her for eleven dollars per month.²¹

The first class of six students— five girls aged six through twelve and Bethune’s five-year-old son Albertus— began classes on October 4, 1904. Bethune welcomed each girl with a cheerful greeting: “Come in, little girl, we’ve been expecting you. I hope you’ll be happy with us.”²² The original name of the school, The Daytona Literary and Industrial Institute, denoted the dual purpose that Bethune envisioned: to teach both academic and practical skills to black girls. The long title was soon shortened by community residents, who simply called it “The School” or “The Bethune School.” Bethune charged a tuition of fifty cents per week for those who could pay. The families of those who could not offered food and services in exchange for tuition. She accepted chickens, eggs, and produce as payment.²³ Extant records dating from 1906 show that Bethune used a ledger to record all income and expenses. In the tuition column many students appeared in a nonpay status.²⁴ With this flexible policy, enrollment tripled within months.

Bethune’s zeal to succeed was legendary: “We burned logs and used charred splinters as pencils, and mashed elderberries for ink. I begged strangers for a broom, a lamp, a bit of cretonne to put around the packing case which served as my desk. I haunted the city dump and trash piles behind hotels, retrieving discarded linen and kitchenware, cracked dishes, broken chairs, pieces of old lumber. Everything was scoured and mended. This was part of the training— to salvage, to reconstruct, to make bricks without straw.”²⁵ She envisioned a setting in which students and teachers worked side by side building a purposeful, self-sufficient community. Together they made almost all of their essentials, including brooms, rugs, mattresses, and writing materials.²⁶

The school soon outgrew its cramped space, and Bethune looked to buy land to erect a larger building. The only property

21. Interview with Bethune, n.d., MMBP, BCCA; Rackham Holt, *Mary McLeod Bethune: A Biography* (New York, 1964), 58.

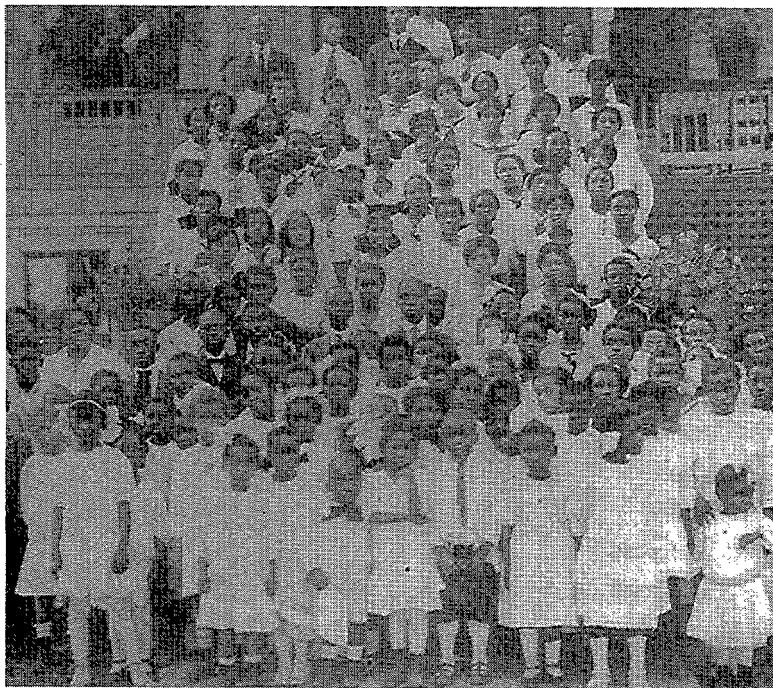
22. Holt, *Mary McLeod Bethune*, 59.

23. Bethune, “Faith That Moved a Dump Heap,” 34.

24. Record Book of the Bethune School, 1906, MMBP, BCCA.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Florence L. Roane, “A Cultural History of Professional Teacher Training at Bethune-Cookman College” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1985), 44.



Bethune and her staff and students on the steps of Faith Hall after Daytona Institute become coeducational. *Photograph reproduced from Patricia and Fred McKissack, Mary McLeod Bethune (Chicago, 1992.)*

that she could afford was a garbage dump called “Hell’s Hole.” To the deeply religious Bethune, this was her inspiration, “to plunge into creating something from nothing.”²⁷ She bought the land for \$250, giving the owner \$5 down in small change, which she had raised by selling homemade ice cream and sweet potato pies. When she delivered the payment wrapped in a handkerchief, Bethune probably recalled a recurring dream in which Booker T. Washington handed her a diamond—also wrapped in a handkerchief—and told her to “go build [you] a school.”²⁸ The actual building began before she knew where she would get the money to finish it. When it was completed, the four-story, forty-by-forty-foot frame house was

27. *Ibid.*

28. Interview of Bethune by Charles S. Johnson, n.d., Oral History Project on Black leaders, MMBP, BCCA.

appropriately named "Faith Hall." It had been built almost entirely with surplus supplies and volunteer labor.²⁹

Bethune initially was responsible for every aspect of the school's operation. She taught all the grade levels and managed the school and all of its outreach and fund raising projects. With increased enrollment, several new teachers joined the staff and were paid between fifteen and thirty dollars a month plus board. Bethune, realizing that her chief assets were her administrative and fund raising skills, sought out experienced teachers. "I need strong women to help me realize this vision."³⁰

One such woman was Frances Keyser, a graduate of Hunter College in New York City and supervisor of the White Rose Mission for delinquent girls in that city. In 1909 she arrived in Daytona and took over the entire educational program of the school, freeing Bethune to concentrate on administrative and fund raising matters. A recipient of the first prize in French at Hunter and a skilled literary critic (to whom Paul Laurence Dunbar submitted his poems for prepublication critique), Keyser's educational programs earned the school its good reputation and state accreditation. Bethune also hired Portia Smiley, a graduate of Hampton Institute and the Pratt Institute of New York, to supervise the domestic science program. Smiley, who had practical nursing skills, was described as "an artist" in domestic science and crafts.³¹

Because of her ability to articulate her vision to others, Bethune attracted a contingent of highly qualified and very dedicated black women teachers who often accepted lower pay in order to join the Bethune "family." With such teachers the school developed a curriculum that reflected the dual traditions of vocationalism and liberalism in black education. Many of the teachers whom Bethune recruited spent their entire careers with her and remained on in the campus community after they retired.

The Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School became the clearest articulation of Bethune's educational philosophy. She followed Booker T. Washington's lead in stressing vocationalism, but her curriculum also reflected her beliefs about the uplifting role of black women as embodiments of morality, service, and self-reliance. At the opening of the school she an-

29. *Ibid.*

30. Holt, *Mary McLeod Bethune*, 102.

31. *Ibid.*, 108.

nounced: "This is a new kind of school. I'm going to teach my girls crafts and homemaking. I'm going to teach them to earn a living. They will be trained in head, hand, and heart. Their heads to think, their hands to work, and their hearts to have faith."³²

Initially, the curriculum offered courses in the domestic sciences. These included sewing, cooking, handicrafts, music, poultry raising, rug weaving, chair caning, and broom making. Academic subjects, such as reading, writing, and mathematics, were also taught along with mandatory Bible study. Early criticism from some blacks, who felt that teaching housekeeping and domestic science prepared the girls for a menial, segregated labor force, dissipated as the curriculum expanded to offer more business and liberal arts courses. As school enrollment increased, Bethune became a leading spokesperson for black political and economic opportunities in Daytona and throughout the segregated South. In a stinging indictment of the evils of segregation in the late 1920s Bethune argued that these practices also hurt whites: "The South has definitely committed itself to the task of keeping the Negro in his place. That place by all accepted teaching and belief is and must be for all time an inferior one. To keep [Negroes] inferior they must be huddled in segregated ghettos without drainage, light, pavement, or modern sanitary convenience. They must be denied justice and the right to make a decent living. They must be insulted and bullied and mobbed, discriminated against in public places and denied access to parks and recreational centers. In dollars and cents the cost of this system is tremendous to the Commonwealth which sponsors it."³³

In Bethune's view, the reality of these conditions made it necessary for black females to support themselves while they simultaneously strove toward better opportunities. Education, she believed, had a dual purpose—survival and uplift. In the early 1900s industrial education and domestic science meant self-sufficiency, but academic and cultural education were also necessary. In her view the two were "concomitant to a better way of living."³⁴ Her education at Scotia Seminary had impressed her with

32. Walter Russell Bowie, *Women Of Light* (New York, 1963), 123.

33. Mary McLeod Bethune, "The High Cost of Keeping the Negro Inferior," MMBP, ARC.

34. Mary McLeod Bethune, "Present-Day Task For Women in the Field of Business," MMBP, ARC.

the possibilities for merging both the academic and vocational aspects of learning and for forging a disciplined community of teachers and students working together for the common good.

"Of what use . . . is an educational system," Bethune asked, "that does not have its roots in the life and needs of the people?"³⁵ From her vantage point those needs centered around the ability to earn a living and help maintain a family. Black females in particular had "special needs" for education and training because of their pivotal economic and social roles in the family. Bethune, who subscribed to Victorian notions of women as agents for moral change, targeted girls because they would be able to instill the notion of moral and spiritual uplift in their families while also earning a living. The "wasteful habits" present in many black homes weighed heavily on black girls. One study of living standards in Negro homes reported: "Sanitary provisions are wholly lacking in many rural homes. Dug wells are used and are often left open and unprotected. Women carry the water long distances. Habits of living are not such as to insure good health. Preventable sickness abounds. . . . Old fashioned superstitions are still followed. . . . Infant mortality is very high. . . . There is but little variety in the diet . . . nor is the food prepared with care—cooking is frequently badly done, starches are too often underdone, and frying is the method of cooking most universally employed. Wasteful habits in handling food prevail. Meals are irregularly served, members of a family being allowed to eat whenever and wherever they please."³⁶

Her curriculum represented a response both to these conditions and to middle-class mores, such as eating meals at a set time. A national report issued in 1923 put the burden of counteracting "the evil effects of present conditions" on the shoulders of females.³⁷ The report concluded that "it is imperative that Negro girls be trained in good-health habits, in wise expenditure of money, in economical use of products . . . [and taught how] to exercise good taste in dress and house furnishings, [that] they may help to make the home both healthful and attractive and to bring the family to a more efficient and happy life."³⁸

35. Ludlow, "Bethune School," 153.

36. Carrie Alberta Lyford, *A Study of Home-Economics Education in Teacher-Training Institutions for Negroes* (New York, 1923; reprint ed., New York, 1969), 3.

37. *Ibid.*, 6.

38. *Ibid.*

Bethune, like other black women educators of her day, touted the value of domestic science for black girls as the best way to improve the family. She once stated: "The education of the Negro girl must embrace a larger appreciation for good citizenship in the home. Our girls must be taught cleanliness, beauty and thoughtfulness and their application in making home life possible. For the proper home life provides the proper atmosphere for life everywhere else."³⁹ In addition to improving the general welfare and stability of the black home, this brand of middle-class conformity emerged as a prerequisite for the full participation of black women in public life and for their recognition as worthy women.

The outreach programs of the school, patterned after those of her mentors Lucy Laney and Booker T. Washington, provided the black community with tangible benefits. There were workshops for the area's farmers which introduced them to modern farming methods, public bazaars to display and sell student projects, and a community center and reading room. Beginning in 1911 Bethune took her staff and students to area turpentine camps to offer both Sunday school classes and lessons in hygiene, health, and sanitary food preparation. Bethune believed that workers' shanties were breeding grounds for "drunkenness, ribaldry and immorality."⁴⁰ Both the black and white communities praised her missionary work in the camps. The following year, 1912, Bethune enlisted one of her trustees to donate the funds to build a YMCA near the campus, which could be used as a recreational outlet for area youth. She also established a summer school and playground for black children.

Also in 1912 she spearheaded the fund raising and building of the first hospital for black people south of St. Augustine.⁴¹ McLeod Hospital, like most of her other endeavors, grew out of a pressing necessity. When one of her students became critically ill with appendicitis, she begged a white physician to admit her to the all-white hospital. Bethune later appeared at the door of the hospital, but a nurse ordered her to the back. "I thrust her aside and found my little girl segregated in a corner of the porch behind the

39. Mary McLeod Bethune, "A Philosophy of Education for Negro Girls," MMBP, ARC.

40. Catherine Owens Peare, *Mary McLeod Bethune* (New York, 1951), 112.

41. Clara Stillman, "A Tourist in Florida," *The Crisis*, February 22, 1924, 173.

kitchen. Even my toes clenched with rage," she later recalled.⁴² This encounter led to a fund drive that built a hospital and started a training program for nurses at the school.

For her hospital project Bethune secured donations from industrialist Andrew Carnegie and other affluent whites who vacationed or resided in Daytona. To the best of their ability, members of the Daytona black community also supported the hospital. The result was a "well-appointed" twenty-six-bed hospital and a nurses training program that maintained an interracial staff of doctors and medical personnel.⁴³

After a thirteen-month training course, nurses went into the city to provide health services to the black community. Between 1917-1918 nurses visited 230 patients. Another 530 patients received treatment at the dispensary, a large number of whom could not pay the nominal fee.⁴⁴ The elderly, sick children, and young mothers were specially targeted for health services. The hospital remained in operation for twenty years, until August 1, 1930, when the county hospital system absorbed the hospital.⁴⁵ In 1912 Bethune started an outreach program for black children in a nearby turpentine camp. The children had little opportunity for any type of schooling, and Bethune hoped to improve unhealthy conditions in the camps by conducting special mission services on the campgrounds.

The school also operated a profitable farm that supplied needed food and sold any surplus to the public. The farm became an important source of revenue. A visitor to the school observed a "splendid patch" of strawberries and asked if they were for the students or to sell. Bethune's reply was to the point: "We never eat a quart when we can get fifty cents for them."⁴⁶

Having limited financial resources, Bethune clearly needed community support from blacks as well as whites for her ambitious programs. From all indications black support helped her during the early years. Bethune was welcomed at black churches and allowed to take up collections for the school. "The School" became a

42. Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York, 1973), 142.

43. Peare, *Mary McLeod Bethune*, 115.

44. Clement Richardson, *The National Cyclopaedia of the Colored Race* (Montgomery, 1919), I, 379.

45. Sadie Iola Daniel, *Women Builders*, rev. ed. (Washington, 1970), 100.

46. Benjamin Brawley, *Negro Builders and Heroes* (Chapel Hill, 1974), 286.

source of pride for community members, and they supported it through frequent fund raising activities. Chicken supper sales were a favorite and frequent fund raising event. Supporters often identified specific needs for these occasions, such as paying a teacher's salary or meeting an overdue bill.⁴⁷ The list of volunteers from the community continued to grow. Construction workers, fund raisers, ministers who taught the Bible course, and others gave hundreds of volunteer hours to the school. Community members were also the principal consumers for the school's developing commercial enterprises, such as farm produce, home crafts, and clothes from the dressmaking department.

Bethune enlisted prominent white and black residents to serve on her board of trustees, and she maximized these connections by also establishing an advisory board that included the wives of many wealthy winter residents. These women were very effective in raising money and sponsoring special programs and projects on behalf of the school. Bethune's frequent speaking engagements to upper-class white women's groups, such as the Palmetto Club, appealed to their sense of noblesse oblige because she emphasized the virtues of cleanliness, hard work, and moral living, which many whites thought the black populace lacked. Bethune, who viewed alcohol as a threat to family life and black progress, founded a campus chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Many of the school's Sunday afternoon programs ended with the WCTU pledge sung in unison by the girls: "God helping me, I promise not to buy, sell, drink, or give, alcoholic liquors while I live."⁴⁸

Among blacks, Bethune's stock continued to rise. Her support for the development of black-owned businesses and the granting of contracts for work at the school to black firms and workers added to her stature. In speeches to black groups, she urged them to patronize black-owned establishments.⁴⁹ She encouraged blacks to vote in county elections, which precipitated the 1920 visit from the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan attempted to silence Bethune and to intimidate potential black voters by marching onto campus in full regalia. In response, she met them at the front of the campus "with

47. "Personal Impressions of A Great Woman by One of Her Students."

48. Ludlow, "Bethune School," 147.

49. Holt, *Mary McLeod Bethune*, 269.

arms folded and head held high."⁵⁰ The frustrated marchers soon left, and the next morning Bethune led a group of blacks to the polls. Polling officials forced the blacks to wait in line the entire day in hopes that they would get tired and go home. Bethune reported, "They kept us waiting all day, but we voted."⁵¹

The ballot to Bethune was a means of fostering change. In 1948 she, along with the new president of Bethune-Cookman College, urged the faculty and students to get involved in the campaign of George Ingram, a black businessman running for a seat on the city council. Although he lost the election to a white politician, this activism inspired other efforts by blacks to organize for economic and political improvements.⁵²

Many white moderates supported Bethune and her work, particularly the school. She admitted that she did her "best missionary work among the prominent winter visitors to Florida."⁵³ She scanned the society pages of the newspaper for notices of newly arrived visitors in Daytona and invited them to visit the school. She recruited her board of trustees in a similar manner. The board included James N. Gamble of Procter and Gamble, who became board president and a lifelong supporter; John D. Rockefeller; and Samuel White, founder of the White Sewing Machine company. Her access to wealthy Northerners such as Rockefeller and Gamble added to her clout among city leaders.

From the beginning, one of her most effective methods of garnering supporters was to distribute leaflets to visitors describing the school's goals. Drawing upon her skills as a missionary, she stood on street corners in the business district and stopped anyone inclined to listen to her message. Soon after the school started, she began making fund raising trips to the North, speaking to both black and white groups. In 1909 she attended a National Association of Colored Women's (NACW) convention in Hampton, Virginia, where she asked permission to address the delegates.⁵⁴ Bethune made such an impression that the club women took up a collection for her school. Fifteen years later Bethune became pres-

50. "Personal Impressions of A Great Woman by One of Her Students."

51. Peare, *Mary McLeod Bethune*, 137.

52. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, June 7, 1988.

53. Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America*, 140.

54. Giddings, *Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, 200.

ident of the NACW. Her advocacy on behalf of black women motivated the founding of the National Council of Negro Women in 1935 with an agenda that included better wages and working conditions, equal educational opportunities for black females, and greater political and economic strength for black women via the ballot box.

Within a few years of her arrival in Daytona, Bethune had become an important catalyst for racial tolerance in the community. Her Sunday afternoon chapel programs were described as “an oasis of integration.” The chapel was the only place in town where seating was not segregated according to race. She diplomatically guided whites to their seats, exclaiming how pleased she was to have them present. Before they realized it, they were sitting next to blacks. Bethune’s involvement in economic ventures with black businessmen, her advocacy of black business ownership, and her diplomacy with whites prompted comparisons with Booker T. Washington. The most notable example of her entrepreneurial spirit was Bethune-Volusia, Inc., which was founded in 1948 and spearheaded by Bethune and businessman George Engram. Their intent was to “establish a Negro beach community . . . owned and controlled by blacks and available to them for construction of homes and recreational facilities.”⁵⁵ The project allowed blacks to use the beaches, many for the first time.

Bethune’s success in Daytona was due to her ability to garner support from large numbers of whites and blacks. Her message of self-help and education appealed, for different reasons, to both groups. Blacks understood her message to mean economic and social empowerment through education and hard work. Most whites did not perceive a threat to their hegemony in helping blacks achieve the kind of practical education and moral values that Bethune espoused. These attitudes helped to ease troubled race relations. Eleanor Roosevelt’s visit to the campus in 1940, however, made some city fathers nervous. The First Lady’s decision to stay in Bethune’s residence on campus rather than at one of the expensive whites-only hotels confirmed her reputation for “race-mixing.” Bethune helped to avert a potentially ugly situation when she arranged for a state police escort after city police refused to

55. Holt, *Mary McLeod Bethune*, 269; *Daytona Evening News*, August 28, 1949.

accompany Mrs. Roosevelt to the college. Unfortunately, the visit had no effect on segregation laws in the city. Daytona continued to segregate until well after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁵⁶

Daytona's image for racial tolerance was a factor in 1948 when Brooklyn Dodger owner Branch Rickey selected the city for Jackie Robinson's debut in the first integrated major league baseball game in modern history. Rickey asked black politician Joe Harris and Bethune to serve as Robinson's hosts. Although city officials promised their "wholehearted co-operation," Robinson's scheduled appearance outraged many whites. Black people throughout the area, including Bethune, enthusiastically supported the black ball player. Ultimately, favorable national attention to the debut created goodwill between both races in Daytona.⁵⁷

The city was the launching pad for Bethune's growing national prominence as a spokeswoman for racial justice and uplift. By becoming increasingly involved in the national debate on race and education, she expanded her contacts and was able to enlist the support of a national constituency of prominent Americans. The school, although never sufficiently endowed, survived and even prospered. She earned a reputation as a consensus builder by voicing the concerns of a diverse constituency— the black underclass, blacks with middle-class aspirations, and a segment of the white citizenry. Her emphasis on practical skills and moral development appealed to a large segment of middle-class blacks as well as both white liberals and conservatives.

America soon took notice. President Roosevelt often sought her advice on racial matters and in 1935 appointed her to head the Negro Division of the National Youth Administration. Bethune's ascendancy to national prominence showcased her skills as an administrator and diplomat— a woman whose interracial reformist tactics and programs were in step with national opinion makers in black and white America. There were other black leaders who articulated more militant and innovative views, but it was Bethune's

56. J. Irving E. Scott, *The Education of Blacks in Florida* (Philadelphia, 1974), 108.

57. Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and his Legacy* (New York, 1983), 104-05.

ability to appeal to people from various factions and ideological positions that ensured her legacy as an institution builder.

The white establishment in Daytona was sometimes uncomfortable with the attention that followed Bethune, especially when it focused the spotlight on their segregationist practices. They, nevertheless, must have felt some reluctant pride in the fact that their most celebrated citizen— a black woman— had rung up a school in their midst and, in doing so, had bestowed a stature on their community far greater than the town founders could have imagined.