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## **“A Monument to the Progress of the Race”: The Intellectual and Political Origins of the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, 1865-1887**

by Larry Eugene Rivers and Canter Brown, Jr.

**T**he Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University entered the twenty-first Century as the nation’s largest historically black college or university and, in doing so, it continued to fulfill its principal historical mission by producing more minority educators-to-be than any other institution in the United States. These facts may catch many Floridians unaware; yet the context within which FAMU managed to accomplish its teacher education mission, having virtually disappeared from our collective consciousness, may offer even greater surprises. The tale involves threads of history drawn from abolitionist professors at Oberlin College; military schools at Hampton, Virginia; the farsighted vision of Florida’s only Reconstruction-era cabinet officer and the first African American elected to the United States Congress; tense rivalries between competing communities; bitter clashes regarding opposing educational philosophies; Redemptionist accommodation; and a bountiful supply of individuals of remarkable talent and education, who yearned to keep alive the phenomenal educational triumph that Reconstruction had worked upon the state of

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Florida. Previously untold in detail, the story provides the foundation for an understanding of FAMU's unique institutional character and of its distinctive liberal arts approach to teacher education.<sup>1</sup>

The public education system out of which FAMU's predecessor institution, the State Normal School for Colored Students, evolved in 1887 traced its own roots to the years that immediately preceded and followed the Civil War's end. Given that no true state public education system existed prior to 1869, the work of various northern relief and missionary organizations—particularly the American Missionary Association—and the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands proved crucial to affording early educational opportunities to those freed by emancipation. These organizations and the Freedmen's Bureau often acted independently, but sometimes worked cooperatively, to guarantee school facilities and the teachers to labor within them.<sup>2</sup>

1. *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, 19 June 2005. On the history of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, see Leedell W. Neyland's excellent *Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University: A Centennial History—1877-1987* (Tallahassee, Fla., 1987). The principal sources available for the history of the Reconstruction and Redemption periods in Florida include Joe M. Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877* (Tallahassee, Fla., 1965); Jerrell H. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (Gainesville, Fla., 1974); Edward C. Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893* (Gainesville, Fla., 1976).
2. On the origins of Florida's public school system and schooling within the state for African Americans, see Nita Katherin Pyburn, *The History of the Development of a Single System of Education in Florida, 1822-1903* (Tallahassee, Fla., 1954); J. Irving E. Scott, *The Education of Black People in Florida* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1974); Joe M. Richardson, "Christian Abolitionism: The American Missionary and the Florida Negro," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 64 (April 1986): 35-44; idem, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens, Ga., 1986); Frederick Bruce Rosen, "The Development of Negro Education in Florida During Reconstruction, 1865-1877" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1974); Janet Snyder Mathews, "The African American Experience in Southwest Florida and the Origins of Dunbar High School in Fort Myers, 1841 to 1927" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1999); Sheryl Marie Howie, "State Politics and the Fate of African American Public School in Florida, 1863-1900" (Master's thesis, University of Florida, 2004); Laura Wallis Wakefield, "'Set a Light in a Dark Place': Teachers of Freedmen in Florida, 1864-1874," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 81 (spring 2003): 401-17. For an excellent study of the origins of African American education generally, see Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, 2005).

Although any number of educational institutions arose as a result of initiatives undertaken by volunteer organizations or the Freedmen's Bureau, four particularly came to prominence within the state that would play significant roles in the series of events that led to the State Normal School's creation. Gainesville's Union Academy, perhaps the first of the four to function on an organized basis, grew out of the endeavors of Catherine Bent. A white woman from Massachusetts, she represented the National Freedmen's Relief Association of New York (NFRA), itself a cooperative effort of the American Missionary Association and the Congregational Church. By late 1867 a board of trustees had coalesced under Freedmen's Bureau supervision. With that agency's support, the board erected a suitable building likely modeled upon plans found in *A Manual on School-Houses and Cottages for the People of the South*, written by Florida's school superintendent C. Thurston Chase and published in 1868. Nearly 180 pupils attended classes there by January 1870.<sup>3</sup>

Less than forty miles to the south at Ocala, a school that would become Howard Academy operated by 1866. Also benefiting at first from NFRA teachers, it quickly attracted popular support within the African American community. Leaders such as Samuel Small, the founding minister of Mt. Moriah Baptist Church and a future county officer and state legislator, urged "fellow freedmen to avail themselves of education and to use their freedom with moderation and providence." Clearly many local parents took the advice. The school prospered, especially when, in the mid-1870s, black principal William J. Simmons took over the institution. Reportedly, by 1877 at least one hundred students studied under his tutelage. To Simmons may go the credit for naming the institution. While a student at Howard University from 1871 to 1873 he had struggled financially. Among those who helped him, Simmons later recorded, was college president Oliver Otis Howard, a former Union army general who had served in Florida during the Third Seminole War of 1855-1858. As Simmons noted,

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3. Murray D. Laurie, "The Union Academy: A Freedmen's Bureau School in Gainesville, Florida." *Florida Historical Quarterly* 65 (October 1986), 165-169; Maxine D. Jones and Kevin M. McCarthy, *African Americans in Florida* (Sarasota, Fla., 1993), 45.

“[Howard] showed him many kindnesses during and after college days.”<sup>4</sup>

Beyond its impact at Gainesville and Ocala, Howard’s Freeman’s Bureau also deserved credit for erecting the first building for Tallahassee’s Lincoln Academy. That event occurred in 1869 and, given the cost of \$5,500, the structure stood out as one of the state’s premier educational facilities. More so than at Gainesville or Ocala, Lincoln’s earliest years witnessed African American educators taking active roles in setting policy as well as teaching. To some extent this fact resulted from the service of African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Presiding Elder Charles H. Pearce as Leon County’s superintendent of schools. Pearce not only strove to implement his church’s aggressive support for public education, he also brought to the state a number of highly capable teachers. Among these Mary E.C. Day (later Smith) stood out. An 1866 graduate of Professor Charles L. Reason’s normal or teacher training school in New York City, Day labored mightily and well to bring the benefits of education and religion to her students. “To say that she is an earnest, indefatigable Christian worker,” a friend explained, “is the smallest meed we can offer her.” Sadly for Day and others, Lincoln burned in January 1872, and its students and teachers remained without an equivalent school building for the next four years.<sup>5</sup>

4. *The Struggle for Survival: A Partial History of the Negroes of Marion County, 1865 to 1976* (Ocala, Fla., 1977), 8, 27-28, 36; Howie, “State Politics,” 17; Kevin McCarthy, *Black Florida* (New York, 1995), 210-11; *Marion County History* (Ocala, Fla., 1997), 55; George Patterson McKinney and Richard I. McKinney, *History of Black Baptists of Florida, 1850-1985* (Miami, Fla., 1987), 78-79; Canter Brown, Jr., *Florida’s Black Public Officials, 1867-1934* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1998), 126; idem, *Ossian Bingley Hart, Florida’s Loyalist Reconstruction Governor* (Baton Rouge, La., 1997), 70, 95-96; William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent Progressive and Rising* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1887), 45.
5. Altamese Barnes and Debra Herman, *African American Education in Leon County: Emancipation Through Desegregation, 1863-1968* (Tallahassee, Fla., 1997), 1-16; Tina Gaynor, “Tallahassee’s Lincoln Academy for African American Children: Its Post-Civil War Origins and Evolution” (undergraduate seminar paper, Florida A&M University, 2004), 5-12 (xerox copy in collection of the authors); Larry Eugene Rivers and Canter Brown, Jr., *Laborers in the Vineyard of the Lord: The Beginnings of the AME Church in Florida, 1865-1895* (Gainesville, Fla., 2001), 34-35, 39, 40-41, 52, 56-59; Charles Sumner Long, *History of the A.M.E. Church in Florida* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1939), 192; Shirletta J. Kinchen, “Edward Waters College, 1890-1901: The Experience of Pioneering Women Educators,” *AME Church Review* 120 (July-Sept. 2004), 31-32; Daria Willis Joseph, “Mary E.C. Day Smith: An Intimate Portrait of a Pioneering Black Educator and AME Minister in Post-Civil War Florida,” *AME Church Review* 121 (July-Sept. 2005) 12-14.

The fourth of the schools, Jacksonville's Stanton Institute, dated its beginnings to 1868, when a board of trustees organized with Freedmen's Bureau assistance. A superb building resulted the following year. This came, in part, thanks to the support of an associate supreme court justice and future governor, Ossian B. Hart, who sold the trustees a city block located immediately across the street from his own home upon which to build the school. At its April 1869 dedication, Hart declared that "the fundamental laws of equality [are] fixed forever; that the colored people [have] aided in fixing these principles; [and that] they should be the basis of all school laws, securing to the children of all classes equality of educational rights and privileges." According to one account, "He spoke at length upon the necessity of patient perseverance, and of making great sacrifices for the education of the children." Chief Justice Edwin M. Randall, a trustee and Hart friend, pointed out the special intentions that lay behind Stanton's creation. "It was open for the education and training of all," he asserted, "and not, as had been said, for the colored children alone." Randall continued, "It was the first of the kind, but they would soon be found all over the State."<sup>6</sup>

Stanton's special mission extended in the eyes of men such as Hart and Randall more broadly than a simple pioneering of racially integrated education because they envisioned the school as serving a purpose similar to that for which the State Normal School ultimately would be created in 1887. Particularly, they and Stanton's other backers were determined to train black men and women to teach and to do so within a highly professional atmosphere. Each of the principal Freedmen's Bureau schools—particularly those at Gainesville, Ocala, and Tallahassee—aimed to prepare black educators, but within limits. As an AME churchman later would remark of Lincoln, "The school was established . . . to . . . better prepare teachers for the schools of the immediate county." Stanton, on the other hand, embraced a

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6. *Program for Benefit Piano Fund, Stanton High School, and Brief History of School, December 3 and 4, 1917* (Jacksonville, Fla., 1917), 5 (in collection of Peter L. Dearing, Jacksonville; xerographic copy in collection of the authors); Brown, *Ossian Bingley Hart*, 226; "The Stanton Normal Institute," undated *Jacksonville Florida Union* clipping c. April 1869, in Records of the Education Division, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1871, M-803, roll 19, National Archives, Washington, D.C.



Stanton Institute, Jacksonville Florida. Image courtesy of James Robertson Ward, *Old Hickory's Town: An Illustrated History of Jacksonville* (1982)

wider scope. Governor Harrison Reed acknowledged the fact at the school's dedication. "We meet here to-day," he observed, "to dedicate the first edifice erected in the State of Florida, for a Normal School, for the education of teachers for freedmen." An 1873 visitor made the point even more clearly. "[Stanton's] large

and commodious school house was . . . designed," he insisted, "to be used for a Colored normal school for the whole state." The school building reflected that promise. "The edifice is the largest for school purposes in the State," a reporter exulted, "and is undoubtedly one of the most perfect structures of the kind ever erected." In line with its purpose, the school adopted as its official name the Stanton Normal Institute.<sup>7</sup>

As it turned out, Stanton achieved impressive results but failed to reach its intended goals. In 1869 white parents refused to send their children to school alongside African American children. Black parents, on the other hand, understood Stanton's potential and quickly grasped the opportunity. "The colored people themselves, taking pride in the handsome edifice which had been erected for their special use, hastened to avail themselves of the benefits," the *Jacksonville Florida Union* informed its readers in July. "Between three and four hundred scholars were soon enrolled as members of the 'Institute,'" its reporter added, "and these were graded as nearly as possible according to age and advancement." Experienced northern teachers aided the process. Initially Catherine Bent, formerly of Gainesville's Union Academy, led the mostly white faculty, although Mary Still, another of Charles H. Pearce's AME protégés, pioneered involvement by black teachers. Significantly, by late 1869 the Williams sisters of Massachusetts had taken over from Bent, bringing with them to Jacksonville a committed perspective. Lucelia E. and P.A. Williams most recently had taught in Virginia, where they had helped to organize the Normal Department at the new Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (later Hampton University). Founded in 1868 by one-time Union officer Samuel Chapman Armstrong, Hampton's program combined reliance upon physical labor with religion and academics, stressing all the while a vocational—as opposed to a classical liberal arts—approach to education. Lucelia, as principal adopted a similar stance during the seven years that the sisters remained at Stanton. In the process and in light of the state's subsequent disinterest in furthering Stanton's intended mission, any sense of a statewide teacher training mission for Stanton disappeared. "It is now

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7. *Philadelphia Christian Recorder*, 9 July 1885; "The Stanton Normal Insitute": *New York Christian Advocate*, 6 March 1873.



occupied as a local school for colored pupils," an 1873 visitor explained, "and seems to be very successfully operating."<sup>8</sup>

Note should be taken before passing along to events occurring in the aftermath of Stanton's failure that the agency of black parents in sending their children to these schools stands out across the chasm of succeeding generations. In many southern areas, including some Florida locales, violence compounded white resentments at black education. The Freedmen's Bureau's general superintendent for education J.W. Alvord highlighted what he referred to as "this time of fearful political excitement." Vigilantes and bushwackers during the period killed or wounded teachers and students in various incidents across the region. One teacher left Florida after six bullets pierced the walls of her home one night. "Whites in Alachua County," historian Jerrell H. Shofner reported, "assaulted a Negro school where northern white teachers insisted on the right to have their students sing the patriotic 'Rally 'Round the Flag.'" A white teacher at Marianna endured harassment simply for holding night classes, while at nearby Campbelltown local whites "hooted" a teacher out of town merely for attempting to start a freedmen's school. In his analysis of the regional situation, Joe M. Richardson noted, "Students were intimidated, stoned, and had their books stolen." In addition, he continued, "School buildings were vandalized and occasionally burned." The courage to assert and to persevere came at a price potentially great indeed.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Stanton's failure to fulfill its intended mission served as context for other efforts to provide teacher education, but the initiatives involved church-sponsored rather than nonsec-

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8. "Stanton Normal School Commencement Exercises," undated *Jacksonville Florida Union* clipping, c. July 1869, in Records of the Education Division, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1871, M-803, roll 19; Long, *History of the A.M.E. Church in Florida*, 187; "Miss Lucelia E. Williams," *American Missionary* 50 (March 1896), 89; *New York Christian Advocate*, 6 March 1873. On the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, see, for example, Mary Frances Armstrong, Helen W. Ludlow, and Thomas P. Fenner, *Hampton and Its Students. By Two of Its Teachers* (New York, 1874); Robert Francis Engs, *Educating the Disfranchised and Disinherited: Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Hampton Institute, 1839-1893* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1999).

9. J. W. Alvord, *Letters from the South Relating to the Condition of Freedmen* (Washington, D.C., 1870), 20; Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 75-76; Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 213-220. On the subject of white resentment to black education, see also Williams, *Self-Taught*.

tarian schooling. Northern Methodists combined at Jacksonville in early 1872, for instance, to establish under the aegis of Reverend Samuel B. Darnell what became Cookman Institute. Named for the Reverend Alfred Cookman, a white Methodist minister whose donation permitted the construction of the first building, the school formally had organized by late spring 1873 “with reference to the management and success of manual labor schools” such as Hampton. A teacher training component complemented the curriculum, however, with students often teaching in local schools “to keep up with their classes” financially. Cookman catered to approximately one hundred students by the late 1870s, but, as Darnell reported in 1877, “our limited resources have compelled us to make necessary accommodations with the most rigid economy.” Growth, accordingly, came sparingly.<sup>10</sup>

At virtually the same time, the AME Church and Florida’s black Baptists acted, as well, to found institutions of “higher learning.” Both denominations centered upon Live Oak for their setting because the town served as Florida’s railroad link to the north. While Baptist leaders, such a Tallahassee’s James Page and Ocala’s Samuel Small, had commenced planning a school by the early 1870s, not until 1880 did the Florida Institute, a predecessor institution of today’s Florida Memorial College, open for students. The Reverend Joseph Leroy Atwood Fish, a graduate of Amherst College and the Newton Theological Institution, guided the school’s fortunes for its first decade.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the AME Church enjoyed more immediate, but less durable, success. Cornerstone-laying ceremonies for Brown’s Theological Seminary, named for AME bishop John Mifflin Brown, took place in July 1872. On that occasion Florida’s first black cabinet officer Secretary of State Jonathan Clarkson Gibbs, a

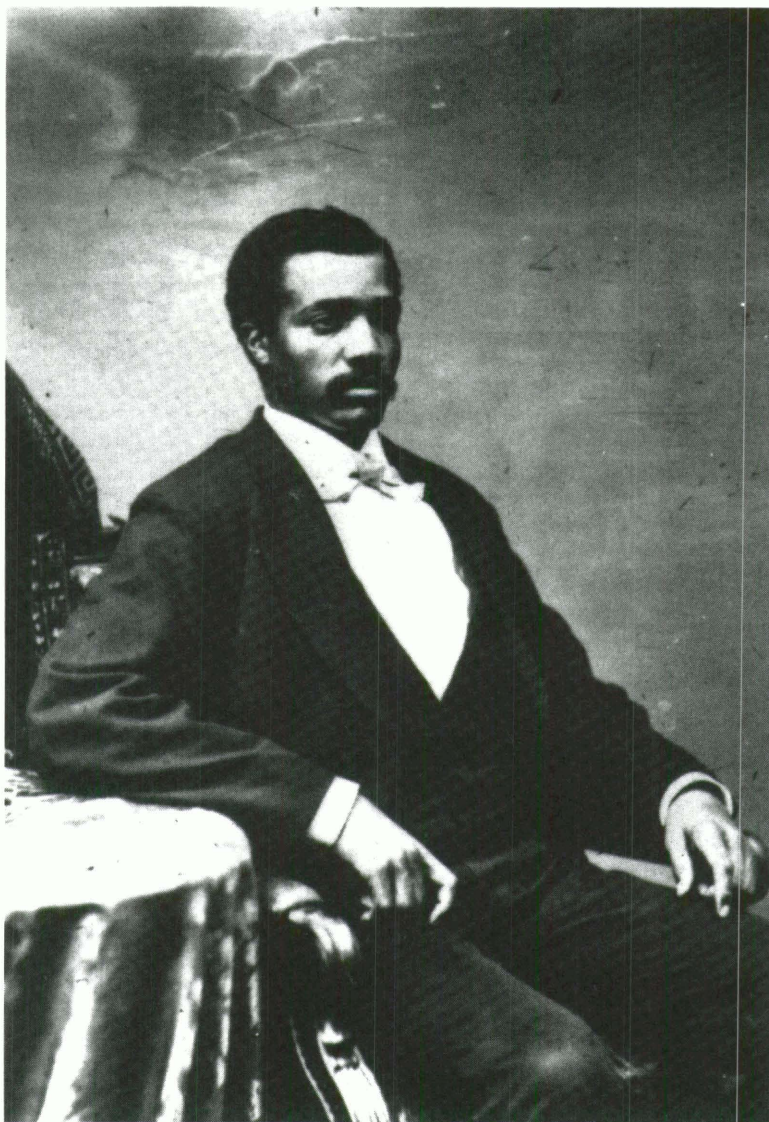
10. *New York Christian Advocate*, 12 June 1873; *Atlanta Methodist Advocate*, 8 January 1873; *Tenth Annual Report, Freedmen’s Aid Society of the M.E. Church* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1878), 34, 36; John T. Foster, Jr., and Sarah Whitmer Foster, *Beechers, Stowes, and Yankee Strangers: The Transformation of Florida* (Gainesville, Fla., 1999), 80-81; Jay S. Stowell, *Methodist Adventures in Negro Education* (New York, 1922), 77.

11. Robert L. McKinney, “American Baptists and Black Education in Florida,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 11 (December 1992), 311; McKinney and McKinney, *History of the Black Baptists of Florida*, 50-55; Larry E. Rivers, “Baptist Minister James Page: Alternatives for African American Leadership in Post-Civil War Florida,” 51, in *Florida’s Heritage of Diversity: Essays in Honor of Samuel Proctor*, ed. by Mark I. Greenberg, William Warren Rogers, and Canter Brown, Jr. (Tallahassee, Fla., 1997).

graduate of Dartmouth College and Princeton Theological Seminary, stressed that “education [is] paramount to all other considerations.” Congressman Josiah Thomas Walls, an African American Civil War veteran, insisted that “the institute would give birth to men who would become prominent and control the events of the state after the founders and patrons present had passed away.” The institutional vision to which they addressed their remarks reached far beyond that of an AME seminary, a fact suggested by a rapid evolution in name to Brown’s Theological and Classical Institute and, in early 1873, Brown’s University of the State of Florida. “We have nothing narrow or exclusive in our plan,” one church father explained. “We have no prejudices of caste or color, all will be freely admitted into our institution, whatever their profession or their race.” The school’s charter meanwhile delineated a mission “to teach theology and the Classics without excluding such studies as tend to promote a liberal and complete education of its students.” The grand concept unfortunately met an abrupt end. A white financial officer stole the school’s funds, and Brown’s University soon shuttered its doors. Not until the establishment of Edward Waters College in the late 1880s and early 1890s did the AME Church’s hopes for higher education in Florida begin to come to fruition.<sup>12</sup>

Real need for teacher training underlay a sense of urgency attached to the founding of Cookman Institute, the Florida Institute, and Brown’s University. The AME Church, acting in cooperation with the black Baptists and African American legislators, had succeeded during 1869 in implementing a provision of Florida’s 1868 constitution providing for a public school system. AME minister Robert Meacham, serving as state senator from Jefferson County, had spearheaded the measure’s passage, but senators Charles H. Pearce and Josiah T. Walls, among others, had labored with him. In the house of representatives Walls’s

12. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, 6 July 1872; *New York Evening Post*, 3 April 1873; Long, *History of the A. M. E. Church in Florida*, 87-92; Rivers and Brown, *Laborers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 68-69, 79-81, 86-89, 91-92, 96, 99-100, 107-108, 174-76. On Jonathan C. Gibbs, see Joe M. Richardson, “Jonathan C. Gibbs: Florida’s Only Negro Cabinet Member,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 42 (April 1964): 363-68; Learotha Williams, “‘A Wider Field of Usefulness’: The Life and Times of Jonathan Clarkson Gibbs, c. 1828-1874” (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 2003). On Josiah Thomas Walls, see Peter D. Klingman, *Josiah Walls: Florida’s Black Congressman of Reconstruction* (Gainesville, Fla., 1976).



Josiah Thomas Walls. *Image courtesy of Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Archives.*

friend Henry S. Harmon of Gainesville and other black Civil War veterans without close ties to any denomination had joined to force the bill's passage. By the time the Reverend Charles Beecher, brother of writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, had assumed

office as state school superintendent in March 1871, 250 schools held 7,500 students. Another 200 schools seemingly had appeared by fall 1872.<sup>13</sup>

The 1872 gubernatorial election revealed that Florida's commitment to public schooling likely would expand significantly in the years to come. Eventual winner Ossian B. Hart had accepted the Republican nomination pledging "the continued education of all the children of the State." On the campaign trail he had underscored sentiments that he had expressed previously that summer at the Brown's Theological Seminary dedication. "Thank God," he exclaimed at one point, "300 free schools and 14,000 pupils in place of none, and more coming all the time." The party's platform adhered closely to his position. "It is the duty of the state to provide for the education of all," it proclaimed, "by providing and supporting a liberal system of common schools, endorsing and sustaining colleges, and by placing within the reach of all the people without discrimination on account of race or color, the means of obtaining at least a thorough common school education." At his January 1873 inauguration, Hart reiterated the theme. On that occasion he promised "to stimulate education until it shall, as it ought to, be universally known as one of the first necessities."<sup>14</sup>

To implement his educational plans, Governor Hart turned during his first weeks in office to Jonathan C. Gibbs, appointing him as Florida's superintendent of public instruction. The gifted educator acted with dispatch to further the work. The progress tallied thereafter during the administration's first half-year merited an invitation for Gibbs to address the National Education Association at its annual meeting held on August 7 at Elmira, New York. Gibbs acknowledged the substantial work remaining to be done but also trumpeted Florida's accomplishments in creating 500 public schools that served 18,000 pupils. "Our great want is competent teachers," he indicated, "and we

13. Howie, "State Politics," 30-34; Foster and Foster, *Beechers, Stowes, and Yankee Strangers*, 76-79; Canter Brown, Jr., "Where are now the hopes I cherished? The Life and Times of Robert Meacham," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 69 (July 1990), 12-13; Klingman, *Josiah T. Walls*, 27; Darius Young, "Florida's Pioneer African American Attorneys During Post Civil-War Florida" (master's thesis, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, 2005), 36-38.

14. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, 6 July, 24 August, 7 September 1872; *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, 7 January 1873.

are compelled in many instances to use material that under more favorable circumstances would be rejected at sight." He praised "the colored Methodists and Baptists [for taking] preliminary steps to establish two institutions of learning for the training of religious teachers"; yet, he looked to the creation of other "colleges and universities" that were "free to all classes of our citizens without distinction of race or color." Gibbs asked, "How are we to have good common schools in Florida without these higher institutions?" He closed with the assertion: "No amount of effort expended, no amount of money applied, no amount of talent and genius called into exercise, can so surely bring peace, good will, and prosperity to the South, as that amount of effort, money, and talent expended for the education of the whole people of the South, without reference to race, color or previous condition."<sup>15</sup>

The excitement generated by Gibbs's achievements with Hart's support appeared evident in the governor's 1874 report to the legislature. "Florida has cause to rejoice greatly that we now have numerous public free schools . . . increasing in numbers and efficiency, open to all the children of the State alike," he declared. "To a large majority of the people, who never saw such a thing before reconstruction, this great blessed fact is ever new and delightful," Hart continued. "Our system is working well." The governor then heaped praise upon Gibbs. "The Superintendent of Public Instruction is very earnest and efficient in his work, and the teachers and officers of the schools in the counties are generally progressing satisfactorily," he added. The governor concluded, "The school facilities need extending more and more as rapidly as possible, and we feel confident that this most important matter will not be neglected."<sup>16</sup>

The excitement also found its reflection in the state's enhanced attractiveness to well educated and highly qualified African American educators. Howard Academy's Principal William J. Simmons offers an excellent example. A native of South Carolina, Simmons had soldiered in the Union army during the Civil War, thereafter attending a succession of colleges until he

15. Scott, *Education of Black People in Florida*, 134-36, 140-41; *American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1873* (New York, 1877), 294-95.

16. *Florida Senate Journal* (1874), 29.

graduated in 1873 from Howard University. Perhaps he learned of Florida opportunities on a brief sojourn to Arkansas after graduation. There, Jonathan C. Gibbs's brother Mifflin Gibbs, a graduate of Oberlin College's law department, presided at Little Rock as municipal judge. In any event, Simmons appeared on the scene at Ocala in September 1874. There, he developed a citrus grove, pursued activist Republican politics, and served as deputy clerk and county commissioner for Marion County, all the while guiding the course of Howard Academy. Greater accomplishments yet remained to Simmons. In 1879, presumably with encouragement from Ocala's Samuel Small, he received ordination as a Baptist minister and soon departed Florida to accept a pastorate at Louisville, Kentucky. Called to the presidency of Kentucky's Normal and Theological Institute (later State University) at Louisville in 1880, he subsequently edited the *American Baptist* newspaper and served the American National Baptist Convention as its president. Awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Wilberforce University in 1885, he issued within two years his respected volume *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising*. He died in 1890 as one of the nation's most-respected African American educators.<sup>17</sup>

Not all of the educators drawn to Florida during Gibbs's tenure as school superintendent departed, as did Simmons, following Reconstruction's end. Matthew McFarland Lewey had entered the world at Baltimore in 1844. A volunteer for Civil War fighting, he served in the Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry after May 1863. Severely wounded in late 1864, Lewey survived to pursue his bachelor's degree at Lincoln University. In 1872 he entered the law department at Howard University, where he remained for one year. A chance encounter with Congressman Josiah Walls resulted in an invitation to teach in Alachua County. At Newnansville, Lewey achieved admission to the Florida bar, presided as mayor, served as postmaster and justice of the peace, and raised Sea Island cotton. Relocating to

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17. Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 39-49; A.W. Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools* (Springfield, Mass., 1892), 439-49; *Diamond Jubilee of the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky: The Story of Seventy-five Years of the Association and Four Years of Convention Activities* (Louisville, Ky., 1943), 29-32; Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders During Reconstruction* (New York, N.Y., 1993), 84-85.

Gainesville in 1881, he headed Union Academy for a term before gaining election to the Florida House of Representatives. A few years afterward, he founded the *Florida Sentinel* newspaper which he published at Gainesville, Pensacola, and Jacksonville. Lewey served two terms as president of the National Negro Press Association and for years headed the Florida State Negro Business League. He died in Florida in 1933, at the age of eighty-four, shortly after publishing the forty-eighth anniversary edition of the *Sentinel*.<sup>18</sup>

Events in the early 1870s also had begun to inspire at least some black Floridians to pursue higher education outside the state at a number of the nation's finest schools. To cite one example, Jonathan C. Gibbs's son Thomas Van Renssalaer Gibbs studied at Howard University before accepting an 1872 appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Small in physical stature, young Gibbs found himself unable to compete outside the classroom. He left the military academy in January 1873 but, by the following year, had opted to attend Oberlin College. The famed center of abolitionist sentiment had emerged as a model for interracial living. While religiously based, the school offered a broad curriculum that permitted a deep grounding in the liberal arts, plus a network of contacts that extended throughout the nation and its most-active intellectual circles. William Sanders Scarborough, who studied at Oberlin while Gibbs resided there, remembered being most impressed by "its strong religious spirit and the marked strength of character of various prominent personalities." Mary Church followed several years later, finding no hint of discrimination and managing to establish close friendships "among the white girls." A family crisis, as will be seen, prompted Gibbs to depart Oberlin for Florida prior to graduation, but his education and connections quickly secured him the position of principal of Jacksonville's

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18. Leedell W. Neyland, *Twelve Black Floridians* (Tallahassee, Fla., 1970), 7-14; Frank Lincoln Mather, *Who's Who of the Colored Race, Vol. I, 1915* (Chicago, 1915), 176; I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (Springfield, Mass., 1891), 170-73; Jerrell H. Shofner, "Florida," 97-100, in *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979*, ed. by Henry Lewis Suggs (Westport, Conn., 1983). On Matthew M. Lewey and the Negro Business League, see David H. Jackson, Jr., "Booker T. Washington's Tour of the Sunshine State, March 1912," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 81 (winter 2003): 254-78.



Oakland School beginning in 1875. He retained the position for a decade.<sup>19</sup>

As events proved, the educational goals articulated by Ossian B. Hart and Jonathan C. Gibbs in good part died aborning. During 1874 both men passed away suddenly, taking with them the dynamic spirit that had permitted Floridians to ponder new possibilities and to consider abandoning old ways. The public school system continued to grow, but a guiding spirit forged from a sense of inevitability no longer served to lead. Meanwhile, political turmoil ruled the day. Other than for a state agricultural college and seminaries at Tallahassee and Gainesville that “people . . . have allowed . . . to fall into disuse as state institutions,” no “colleges and universities” for public teacher training received the state’s blessings. Hopes of racially integrated public schooling ebbed away, too. Representative of the times, in 1875 black leaders at Tallahassee—including Henry S. Harmon, Charles H. Pearce, and State Senator John Wallace, a Civil War veteran and close friend of Congressman Walls—appealed merely for a portion of the meager funds available to the West Florida Seminary “to make the provisions necessary to give our children the benefits they are entitled to.” The local Democratic newspaper advised, “Haste is not necessary.”<sup>20</sup>

Ironically for the black schools at Tallahassee and Jacksonville, the state leadership ebb resulted in a reinvigorated local situation. Leon County assumed responsibility for Lincoln Academy, for instance, expending \$8,000 for a substantial school building to replace the one that had burned in 1872. Mary E.C. Day had shepherded the school through its homeless days, but Henry S.

19. *New York Freeman*, 11 April 1885; *Savannah Morning News*, 25 January 1873; Johnson, *Along This Way*, 58; “Thomas V. Gibbs” in “Addendum to the ‘Catalogue and Record of Colored Students,’ 1852-99,” *Minority Student Records*, RG 5/4/3, Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio; Francis P. Weisenburger, “William Sanders Scarborough: Early Life and Years at Wilberforce,” *Ohio History* 71 (October 1962), 213; W. E. Bigglestone, “Oberlin College and the Negro Student, 1865-1940,” *Journal of Negro History* 56 (July 1971), 199. For more on Oberlin College, see Cally L. Waite, *Permission to Remain Among Us: Education for Blacks in Oberlin, Ohio, 1880-1914* (Westport, Conn., 2003); William Gay Ballantine, *Oberlin College: Oberlin Jubilee, 1833-1883* (Oberlin, Ohio, 1883).

20. Brown, *Ossian Bingley Hart*, 294-96; *Jacksonville Tri-Weekly Florida Union*, 18 August 1874; *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, 6 July 1875; *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1874* (New York, 1877), 102; Howie, “State Politics,” 38-42.

Harmon emerged as principal in the new structure. The state's first African American attorney and a former legislator and clerk of the Florida House of Representatives, he had studied at Philadelphia's well-regarded Institute for Colored Youth. Thanks to allocations from the Peabody Fund that reflected increased support from that philanthropic source for normal schools, Lincoln enjoyed a nine-month term. After the state's political "Redemption" in January 1877, however, Democratic policy essentially mandated replacement of black principals with white ones. Harmon lost his job as a result. "The colored school in this city is making only very measured progress," a visitor noted in 1878, "in the charge of a southern white man as principal." A similar situation then prevailed at Union Academy. "This year there has been quite a contest about it in Gainesville," the same visitor noted, "but notwithstanding the stern opposition shown by our people, the Board of Education in that place persisted in placing a white man in the colored school as principal, with the determination that he shall remain his time out and be paid accordingly, whether our people send a single scholar or not." He added, "The result is that, where there ought to be about 200 pupils attending that school, there are only 15."<sup>21</sup>

Stanton Institute, because it did not form a part of the Duval County school system until 1882, managed to resist the trend toward white control and, in fact, moved away from it. In early 1876 its board of trustees handed the principalship to the Reverend James Cornelius Waters, an AME minister and Lincoln University graduate. At Stanton, as one biographer noted, "he successfully maintained a high grade school of more than four hundred pupils." One of Waters's students, James Weldon Johnson, recalled him as "a well-educated man and an eloquent speaker." Johnson continued, "I regarded him with awe, and could not have imagined a worse stroke of fate than to be called upon before him." Whether through the administration of discipline, from classroom teaching or from example, Waters touched his charges deeply. "It was, of course, infinitely far from my knowledge," Johnson admitted, "that J.C. was making a set of impressions on my mind against the time when I should stand in his place as the head

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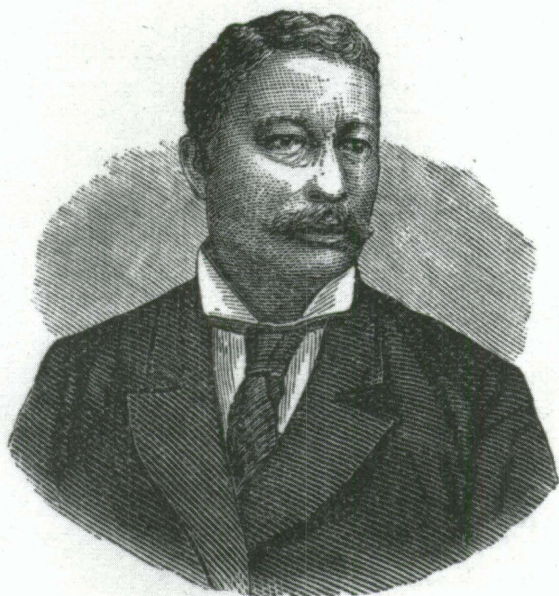
21. Gaynor, "Tallahassee's Lincoln Academy," 11-14; Young, "Florida's Pioneer African American Attorneys," 39-40, 51-52; *Philadelphia Christian Recorder*, 28 November 1878; Pyburn, *History*, 119.

of Stanton; impressions that would come back fresh and constrain me either to follow or avoid his example.” The AME Church transferred Waters to South Carolina after five years at Stanton and in Jacksonville, charging him with responsibility for establishing what became Allen University. As president of Allen in 1882, he received from his alma mater Lincoln University the distinction of a Doctor of Divinity degree.<sup>22</sup>

A few advances such as those at Lincoln and Stanton could not hide from Florida’s black leaders the new political reality that confronted the state beginning in 1877, and the reaction of most differed from those of a few. The few consisted of three men with close ties to now-former congressman Josiah T. Walls—William U. Saunders, Peter W. Bryant, and John Willis Menard—who took it upon themselves in March 1877 to call upon newly seated Republican president Rutherford B. Hayes to request assurances that his “policy of reconciliation” toward southern whites “would work in the best interest of all.” Although the three comprised an unofficial delegation, they possessed credentials of a formidable nature. Saunders, a Baltimore native and Civil War veteran with strong ties in national Republican circles, had moved to Florida on behalf of the National Republican Committee in 1867. He sat as a delegate in the state constitutional convention the following year, eventually establishing political and personal ties with Walls that, by 1874, embraced a law partnership that also included Henry S. Harmon. Peter B. Bryant meanwhile stood out as one of the state party’s most promising young men. Anchored at Tampa and Key West, he personally had nominated Ossian B. Hart for governor in 1872. He and Walls had come to know each other not only through politics but also through the state militia, where Major Bryant served on the staff of Brigadier General Walls. In 1876 Bryant, who eventually would graduate from Howard University Law Department, had represented Florida as a delegate to the Republican National Convention.<sup>23</sup>

22. John R. Scott to Joseph E. Lee, 8 January 1876, Box 2, Joseph E. Lee Papers, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee; Benjamin W. Arnett, *The Budget: Containing Biographical Sketches, Quadrennial and Annual Reports of the General Officers of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Dayton, Ohio, 1884), 18-19; Johnson, *Along This Way*, 35-36.

23. *Tampa Sunland Tribune*, 31 March 1877; *Jacksonville Florida Union*, 9 November 1867; *Jacksonville Tri-Weekly Florida Union*, 30 June 1874; *Tallahassee Sentinel*, 7 August 1875; Joe M. Richardson, *Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida*, 143-46, 153-57; Klingman, *Josiah Walls*, 3, 12-13, 17, 19, 25, 29, 32, 57, 55, 95; Young,



*J. Willis Menard*

J. Willis Menard. *Image from Menard, Lays in Summer Lands.*

The third member of the 1877 delegation, John Willis Menard, merits particular consideration. An Illinois native and graduate of Iberia College, he possibly had enjoyed a personal relationship with Abraham Lincoln derived from their mutual pre-Civil War resi-

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"Florida's Pioneer African American Attorneys," 46-47; *New York Globe*, 16 June 1883; *Jacksonville Daily Florida Union*, 13 June 1876; Canter Brown, Jr., and Barbara Gray Brown, *Family Records of the African American Pioneers of Tampa and Hillsborough County* (Tampa, Fla., 2003), 39-40.

dence in and near Springfield. More certainly, Lincoln's administration had drawn Menard to government employment in the nation's capital during the conflict, where he had involved himself in the president's schemes for colonization of freedmen. At New Orleans by the war's end, the eager young man had plunged into political life while editing a local newspaper. Voters there in 1868 elected him to the United States House of Representatives, affording Menard the distinction of having been the first African American so honored. The body refused to seat him, however, with some suggesting that race played a role in the decision. By 1871, in any event, Menard had relocated to Jacksonville where a post office position awaited him, although he soon re-established himself as a newspaperman. As he had in Louisiana, Menard once more launched into political life, serving in the Florida House of Representatives during Governor Hart's brief administration and, later, pursuing an unsuccessful bid for Congress against Josiah Walls. Changing circumstances had compelled the two men to salve their wounds by 1876, and they had initiated what was to become a close friendship and political alliance.<sup>24</sup>

The temerity of these associates of Congressman Walls in meeting with the president on behalf of the state's African American community deeply distressed many of Florida's principal black leaders, none more so than Joseph E. Lee. A Philadelphia native born in 1849 and a graduate of the city's Institute for Colored Youth, Lee had furthered his education at the Howard University Law Department where he had developed a rapport with white Florida Congressman William J. Purman. An avid Republican regular, Lee had moved to Jacksonville at Purman's suggestion, practiced law, and pursued politics. In 1874 he had replaced John Willis Menard in the Florida house and, as a biographer noted, begun to consider himself "master of the situation." Although he later emerged as a leading AME minister, Lee's single-minded pursuit of goals polarized opinion. Matthew M. Lewey later heaped praise upon the man. "Mr. Lee has been a success from the start," Lewey opined, "no Negro in the South, since the

24. Larry Eugene Rivers and Canter Brown, Jr., "John Willis Menard and *Lays in Summer Lands*," 91-110. in John Willis Menard, *Lays in Summer Lands*, ed. By Larry Eugene Rivers, Richard Mathews, and Canter Brown, Jr. (Tampa, Fla., 2002); Thomas V. Gibbs, "John Willis Menard: The First Colored Congressman Elected," *A.M.E. Church Review* 3 (April 1887), 426-32; Klingman, *Josiah Walls*, 60, 111, 127-29.

days of reconstruction has had thrust upon him more honor than Joseph E. Lee.” T. Thomas Fortune, a Jackson County native who knew Lee at Jacksonville as early as the 1870s, felt quite differently. “Mr. Lee’s method was to control the Negro and to so work with the white Republican leaders as to secure for himself the best Federal position in the State regardless of the interests of others,” Fortune recorded, “so that when he died the Negro in Florida had been frozen out of the public service, with the exception of himself.” Fortune concluded, “It would have been better for the Negro of Florida if Joseph E. Lee had remained in his Philadelphia home instead of carpet-bagging it in Florida.”<sup>25</sup>

Personal rivalries of the type that grew between Joseph E. Lee and John Willis Menard were to play a crucial role in the decision-making process that led to the creation of the State Normal School and its placement at Tallahassee, but in 1877 the Lee-Menard rivalry underlay, at least partially, Lee’s May thirtieth call for the “colored men of this State” to “assemble in council at Tallahassee” on July fourth. State Senator Wallace, Newnansville mayor Lewey, recently deposed Lincoln Academy Principal Harmon, and numerous others attended. As Lee doubtlessly had hoped, the gathering denounced Menard for pursuing the meeting with Hayes and endorsed the president’s southern policy despite its aspects favorable to white conservatives. The assembly issued, as well, an address “to the colored people of the State of Florida” expressing guarded hope for the future but warning of the need for safeguarding families by land and home ownership, temperance, and education.<sup>26</sup>

25. *Birmingham* (Eng.) *Good Templars’ Watchword*, 8 January 1879; Washington (D.C.) *Colored American*, 28 September 1901; *Pensacola Florida Sentinel*, 1904 Annual Edition; *Norfolk* (Va.) *Journal and Guide*, 12 November 1927. On Joseph E. Lee’s political career generally, see Gary B. Goodwin, “Joseph E. Lee of Jacksonville, 1880-1920: African American Political Leadership in Florida” (master’s thesis, Florida State University, 1996); Peter D. Klingman, *Neither Dies Nor Surrenders: A History of the Republican Party of Florida, 1867-1970* (Gainesville, Fla., 1984); Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley, Cal., 2005). On the careers in Florida of African American “carpetbaggers” from Pennsylvania, including Lee, see Larry E. Rivers, “‘He Treats His Fellow Man Properly’: Building Community in a Multi-Cultural Florida,” 111-26, in *Amid Political, Cultural and Civic Diversity: Building a Sense of Statewide Community in Florida*, ed. By Lance deHaven-Smith and David Colburn (Dubuque, Iowa, 1998).

26. *Savannah Morning News*, 21 June 1877; *Jacksonville Daily Sun & Press*, 8 July 1877; *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, 19 July 1877; *Jacksonville Weekly Florida Union*, 14 July 1877.

The assembly's educational goals appeared modest indeed, reflecting the general sense of frustration and loss of direction then felt within the leadership of the state's African American community. The address simply endorsed the benefits of "an elementary education" and lauded the public schools as "not merely charitable institutions." An education committee headed by Henry Harmon issued its own report adding detail. "Among the institutions of learning, none has challenged our admiration and emulation more than the Cookman Institute and Stanton School of Jacksonville," it observed, "the former showing the truly christian efforts of Prof. S. B. Darnell, and the last the philanthropic feeling actuating Rev. J. C. Waters—and each harmonizing into glorious results for the future." The report continued, "We look upon the establishment of an Agricultural College in this State as the great industrial medium which is said to aid largely in the material development of our race, and recommend all to take advantage of its provisions." It concluded, "We hope the day is not far distant when the Seminary Fund of our State may be opened to the enjoyment of our race without the necessity of forcing its trustees to recognize our rights."<sup>27</sup>

Among those unimpressed with such modest ambitions for education stood former Congressman Walls, and he already had acted to illustrate his sentiments. Out of congress in 1876, he had won back his old state senate seat representing Alachua County. During the legislature's opening days in January 1877, he had attempted to resign all his committee assignments save for the education committee. Rebuffed, he then had sponsored a resolution that empowered the education committee to "examine the manner in which the Public Schools have been conducted in the several counties." That motion carried, but his subsequent attempt to achieve enactment of a law requiring mandatory public education for all children between the ages of six and fifteen gained only one senate vote other than his own, that of John Wallace. The personal friendship existing between the Civil War veterans then had endured for perhaps thirteen or fourteen years. The historian Reginald Ellis has suggested that the two came to know each other during the war while taking classes at the army's Mary S. Peak School, a facility within Fortress Monroe near Hampton, Virginia.

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27. *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, 10 July 1877; *Jacksonville Weekly Florida Union*, 14 July 1877.

Others of the veterans who attended the school there and later located in Florida came to know, along with Walls and Wallace, the Africa-born teacher Thomas De Saliers Tucker, who then was pursuing his bachelor's degree through Oberlin College. As will be seen, ties thus forged proved crucial in time to the founding of the State Normal School.<sup>28</sup>

The ability of men such as Walls and Wallace to achieve educational innovations declined frustratingly in the years of the late 1870s and early 1880s when rule by the Bourbons, as conservative and business-oriented Democrats came to be called, entrenched itself on a statewide level. During this period, with the certainties of racial oppression to come remaining at present only possibilities, both political parties experienced stresses and, eventually, cracks. For a time, however, most black leaders clung to their traditional party even though many abandoned hopes for meaningful support from white Republicans. In December 1878 John Willis Menard voiced in the *New York Times* what many of his fellows had pondered by demanding, as Bess Beatty characterized it, "an end to black dependence on the northern Republicans." Increased emphasis resulted on supporting black candidates for higher office, with education often forming a centerpiece for campaign rhetoric. The ultimately unsuccessful 1880 congressional candidacy of AME minister George Washington Witherspoon, a one-time Gadsden County slave who had emerged as one of the state's most-influential political and religious figures, particularly highlighted this trend. At the Republican State Convention that year Menard, Wallace, and Harmon joined with Witherspoon in a typical manner to denounce the Democratic Party, in Menard's words, "[as] one of retrogression and persecution." Harmon elaborated in words that underscored their emphasis on educational concerns. A reporter quoted him in this manner: "Harmon . . . said that the Democrats had enacted no laws detrimental to any race—that they didn't need any laws, but acted independent and in defiance of all law—that they took away their schools, their liberty, their life—

28. Klingman, *Josiah Walls*, 118-19; Reginald Ellis, "Nathan B. Young: Florida A&M College's Second President and His Relationships with White Public Officials," 155, in *Go Sound the Trumpet! Selections in Florida's African American History*, ed. By David H. Jackson, Jr., and Canter Brown, Jr. (Tampa, Fla., 2005); Robert F. Engs, *Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, Virginia, 1861-1890* (New York, 2004), 36, 48.



robbed thousands of Republicans of the right to vote—that if the Republican party nominated a Devil, they would support and elect him.”<sup>29</sup>

As political fortunes of African Americans continued to decline despite the exertions of those men who resisted the tide, educational aspirations suffered accordingly. Evidence of malaise appeared seemingly at every hand. During his last legislative session in 1879, for example, Senator Walls apparently just stopped attending. Walls biographer Peter D. Klingman explained. “With no clout left to him on any level,” he commented, “it made sense to retire.” The former congressman devoted most of his considerable energies to developing his Alachua County plantation. It became an agricultural showplace, and by 1885 his assets reportedly came to the very large sum of fifty thousand dollars.”<sup>30</sup>

The declining fortunes of Stanton Institute meanwhile reflected ills witnessed increasingly on the education scene. After Principal J.C. Waters’s departure in 1881, the trustees turned to a well-meaning but inexperienced Presbyterian minister named Daniel Wallace Culp. Although a graduate of Biddle University and the Princeton Theological Seminary, Culp little understood at that early point in his career the dynamics of institutional leadership. “He was a poor teacher,” James Weldon Johnson recalled. “As an administrator he had no success.” Johnson continued, “The school got to be a sort of go-as-you-please institution, and many parents took their children out and sent them elsewhere.” Faced with a financial crisis, school trustees in 1882 surrendered Stanton and its independence to the Duval County school board. The next year serious problems gave way to calamity. In October an arsonist torched the school. “The fire burned so rapidly,” one account noted, “that the building was beyond salvation when the fire department reached it.”<sup>31</sup>

29. Klingman, *Neither Dies Nor Surrenders*, 76-84; *New York Times*, 9 December 1878; Bess Beatty, “John Willis Menard: A Progressive Black in Post-Civil War Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 59 (October 1980), 130; Canter Brown, Jr., “George Washington Witherspoon: Florida’s Second Generation of Black Political Leadership,” *A.M.E. Church Review* 119 (January-March 2003), 66-70; *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, 18 May 1880.

30. Kingman, *Josiah Walls*, 121, 124-25; *New York Freeman*, 28 February 1885.

31. Daniel W. Culp, *Twentieth Century Negro Literature or Cyclopaedia of Thought on the Vital Topics Relating to the American Negro* (Toronto, Can., 1902), 9; Johnson, *Along This Way*, 61; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 20, 21 October 1883.

The brightest light on the dimming educational horizon came from the fact that at Gainesville, Ocala, and Tallahassee black advocates managed to place control of Union, Howard, and Lincoln Schools in the hands of black administrators, even though quick turnovers diminished the degree of positive result. Matthew M. Lewey, as mentioned earlier, had taken over as principal of Union Academy in 1881 for one school term. His replacement, Jacob Reed Ballard, offered excellent credentials. A graduate of Philadelphia's Institute for Colored Youth, he had served in the United States Navy during the Civil War before settling at Fernandina. There he taught school while backing the Republican Party. Eventually he became a principal, Nassau County's supervisor of colored schools," and an elected local official. Unfortunately for Union Academy backers, Ballard also had pursued training for the Episcopal priesthood. He achieved that goal in June 1882, becoming the first black Floridian to receive ordination as an Episcopal deacon. His bishop then quickly assigned Ballard to Tallahassee, where the priest organized St. Michael and All Angels Church and took over the principalship of Lincoln Academy. Back at Gainesville, twenty-one-year-old Lemuel Walter Livingston, a native of Monticello and a graduate of Cookman Institute, temporarily took control of the school following his unsuccessful attempt to enter the United States Military Academy. Within a matter of months, though, Livingston had departed to pursue a medical degree at Howard University. A degree of permanence finally appeared for Union Academy in the person of M.J. Mattox. A graduate of Worcester College, he arrived directly from the State Normal School at Tuskegee, Alabama, where he had taught history and elocution. Along with Mattox came the vocational education concepts that Tuskegee principal Booker T. Washington had drawn from his student years at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute.<sup>32</sup>

32. J. Reed Ballard to B. H. Bristow, 12 February 1876, Records Relating to Customs Service Nominations, Fernandina, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, Box 66, National Archives; *Jacksonville Florida Daily Times*, 11 June, 24 September 1882; *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, 23 October 1882; Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 73; *New York Freeman*, 18 August 1882, 23 May 1885; *Philadelphia Christian Recorder*, 12 October 1882; Daniel Smith Lamb, *Howard University Medical Department: A Historical Biographical and Statistical Souvenir* (Washington, D.C., 1900), 192-93.

The situation at Ocala also stabilized at about the same time that Mattox took over in Gainesville. Following William J. Simmons's 1879 departure, a Professor W. H. Lewis assumed the principal's position at Howard for several years. His decision in November 1883 to accept a post at Sherman, Texas, led to the designation of a teacher who had worked under Simmons as Lewis's replacement. That man, Henry Wilkins Chandler, at the time represented Marion County in the state senate and also served as Ocala's city clerk. A native of Maine and a graduate of Bates College and the Howard University Law Department, Chandler had commenced his teaching career locally in fall 1876. Within two years he had achieved admission to the bar of Florida and taken up the practice of law. A Baptist, he soon had worked a revolution in Marion County politics by defeating a lion of the AME Church, longtime State Senator Thomas Warren Long, in the 1880 state senate contest. So prominent did Chandler become within Florida's African American community that his 1884 marriage to Annie M. Onley, the daughter of wealthy Jacksonville contractor and businessman John E. Onley, commanded national attention. The bride's pastor Daniel Wallace Culp, stepping aside for a moment from his trials as Stanton Institute's principal, performed the nuptials.<sup>33</sup>

Social events such as the Chandler-Onley wedding enlivened a very challenging atmosphere for Florida's African American leaders during the early 1880s, and one event of that nature cemented a family and political alliance that was to affect significantly the course of the State Normal School's creation and evolution. On July 13, 1882, John Willis Menard's daughter Alice J. Menard wed Thomas Van Renssalaer Gibbs at Jacksonville's Laura Street Presbyterian Church. The Reverend Jacob Reed Ballard, fresh from duties as Union Academy principal and months away from assuming the same position at Tallahassee's Lincoln, performed the ceremony in the place of church pastor Daniel Culp. Even the local white newspapers carried detailed reports of the celebration, with the *Florida Daily Times* characterizing the event as "one of the most fashionable weddings among colored people that has taken place in this city for some time." Early the next year Gibbs would

33. *Ocala Banner-Lacon*, 19 May, 30 June 1883; *New York Globe*, 1 December 1883, 18 October 1884; Brown and Brown, *Family Records*, 47-49; Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 40-41, 80.

MONUMENT TO THE RACE



Thomas Van Renssalaer Gibbs (1855-1898), From: Leedell W. Neyland and John W. Riley, *The History of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University* (1963). Image Courtesy of the Photographic Collection, Florida Archives.

reflect upon the meaning of the occasion and three similar weddings that occurred about the same time. "Out of [one distinguished friend's house] have gone within one year, four brides,"

he informed the *New York Globe*, “to lighten the way and brighten the course of as many young aspirants for fortune and fame.”<sup>34</sup>

Gibbs’s words point out that some hints of a better future had begun to circulate within Florida’s African American community by 1883. The so-called Independent Movement recently had recharged many spirits by affording a political path along which hands could reach across racial lines to forge cooperation for a better future. Particularly, it united reform-minded white Democrats and black Republicans in a direct assault upon Bourbon power in the state. “I need not tell you that the success of the Independent movement is the only salvation for the Negroes of the South,” John Willis Menard declared in April 1883 to a national audience, “and that those Republican leaders who are opposed to this movement are acting in the direct interest of hide-bound Bourbonism and the continued solidity of the South.” Regular Republican leaders such as Joseph E. Lee and Lemuel W. Livingston naturally rejected calls for Independent support, but other leaders quickly ranged themselves alongside Menard. Veterans such as Josiah Walls, Matthew Lewey, and John Wallace particularly seemed to accept the practical approach involved with coalition building.<sup>35</sup>

Matthew Lewey especially felt re-energized, and in early 1883 he directed the force of his renewed spirit in a surprise effort to compel the legislature to recognize the need for regularized non-sectarian teacher training for African American students. Elected as a state representative from Alachua County in late 1882, he took steps the following January to require the house education committee “to enquire whether or not it would be wisdom to establish a Normal Department at Lincoln Academy, Tallahassee, and at Union Academy, Gainesville.” The step came in light of former state school superintendent William P. Haisley’s recent attempts to provide some state-supported teacher training. For African Americans, this meant the holding of a few “teacher institutes” subsidized by the Peabody Fund. The experience, Haisley had informed the public, had convinced him of the need for “normal schools as means of preparing teachers.”<sup>36</sup>

34. *Jacksonville Florida Daily Times*, 16 July 1882; *New York Globe*, 14 April 1883.

35. Williamson, *Florida Politics*, 83-85, 91-93, 97, 104-105; Klingman, *Neither Dies Nor Surrenders*, 87-92; Brown, *Florida’s Black Public Officials*, 50, 55-59; *New York Globe*, 21 April 1883.

36. *Florida House Journal* (1883), 202; *Bulletin of Atlanta University* 34 (February 1892), 6; Pyburn, *History*, 119.

Lewey had crafted his proposal, a plan that excluded Stanton and Howard, with care and in light of political realities. The governor, William D. Bloxham, hailed from Leon County and maintained close relationships with several local black politicians, most particularly John Wallace. Second, Bloxham, a one-time teacher and staunch education advocate, had appointed a new state school superintendent in the person of Albert J. Russell, a Virginia-born Confederate veteran nonetheless known for his support of quality schooling for African Americans. Additionally, the 1882 elections had resulted in a house of representatives closely divided between Democrats (40 seats) and a Republican-Independent bloc (36 seats). Of all black members of the assembly, a majority represented Alachua and Leon counties, or an adjacent county. In the senate, only two blacks sat in the thirty-three member body. Henry Chandler of Marion was one. The other was schoolteacher John Elias Proctor of Leon, a regular Republican who had bested John Wallace to gain his seat. Finally, by centering on Tallahassee and Gainesville, the homes of the two state seminaries, Lewey had positioned his proposal to merit a long-sought portion of the state's seminary fund and to deny the same funds to Stanton Institute at a time when Joseph E. Lee, for whom Lewey then felt little affection, dominated Republican politics in Duval County.<sup>37</sup>

Circumstances suggest that the failure of his attempt came as a surprise to Lewey, although it could not be said that he came away empty handed. The setback stemmed from the action of Dr. John Junius Harris of Sanford, then in Orange County. A graduate of Emory College and the Medical College of Georgia, he had presided in 1881 as speaker of the house of representatives and now chaired the education committee. "We are of the opinion," he informed the body on the committee's behalf, "that much of the money expended in the so-called education of colored children is simply wasted." Harris went on, however, to endorse the value of teacher education. First, he called for the creation of normal departments in the white seminaries at Tallahassee and

37. James C. Clark, "John Wallace and the Writing of Reconstruction History," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67 (April 1989), 411, 423-24; *Jacksonville Florida Dispatch, Farmer and Fruit-Grower*, 23 May 1889; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 3 June 1884, 16 February 1888; J. V. Drake, *The Florida Legislature (Twelfth Session): An Official Directory of the State Government* (Jacksonville, Fla., 1883), 76-77; Lee H. Warner, *Free Men in An Age of Servitude: Three Generations of a Black Family* (Lexington, Ky., 1992), 94, 128-34.

Gainesville. Then, he proposed “the establishment of Normal Departments . . . in such school or schools, not exceeding two, for colored pupils, as the State Superintendent may select.” Given that Superintendent Russell had served as head of Duval County’s school system in prior years, the likelihood appeared that one of the departments was destined for Stanton. As eventually passed, what became known as the Bloxham bill came closer to Lewey’s hopes, likely from Bloxham’s intervention. It called for normal departments at Lincoln and Union academies but left implementation in Superintendent Russell’s hands. That officer then interpreted the law to allow him, in lieu of creating normal departments, to hold “normal schools” and “teacher institutes” at the two academies and at other locales during specified periods of time. Two such sessions commenced at Madison and Lake City later that year within weeks after an arsonist’s fire consumed Stanton Institute.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond what appearances suggested, however, it seems that Lewey quietly had gained a great deal more from the 1883 session than authorization for a normal department at Union Academy. Whatever conversations occurred or agreements he concluded, Lewey departed from Tallahassee following the legislature’s adjournment believing that, with proper preparations, he could convince the 1885 legislature to mandate a “State Normal and Industrial College” at Gainesville. At home he enjoyed the wholehearted support of Alachua County’s white school chief, future state school superintendent and Emory College graduate William N. Sheats. As a first step, Sheats solicited support from the Peabody and Slater Funds while undertaking substantial renovations to Union Academy. “The school building, finished in the first part of this scholastic year,” an 1885 report observed, “is a gem of rare beauty and excellence.” The report added: “It is valued at \$5,000, and a more beautiful school building is not in the State. It is furnished with the latest improved desks imported from New England, teachers’ desks and tables, maps, charts, a very large mounted globe, an eight-day calendar clock, blackboards and a bell swinging high in the steeple to call the children daily.” Sheats,

38. Neyland, *Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University*, 3; *Florida House Journal* (1883), 202; *Savannah Morning News*, 22 January 1881; E. Ashby Hammond, *The Medical Profession in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Florida* (Gainesville, Fla., 1996), 242-43; *Laws of Florida* (1883), 66; *New York Globe*, 11 November 1883; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 20 November 1883, 20 June 1884.

Lewey, and Principal M. J. Mattox meanwhile searched for teachers qualified to fulfill their vision of a normal and industrial school modeled on the vocationally oriented program then being developed at Tuskegee by Mattox's former employer Booker T. Washington. By November 1884, they had assembled a faculty that consisted of "G.R. McAlvaine, a graduate of Fisk, vice-principal; G. H. Goodwin, graduate of Atlanta Baptist Seminary; [and] Misses Sarah A. Blocker of Atlanta University and Mattie A. Murphy, Camden, S.C." As the 1885 report also noted, "The school . . . is now enjoying some of the brightest days of its existence."<sup>39</sup>

As hammers pounded and saws ground at Gainesville, the eyes and ears of politically attuned Floridians turned to the 1884 elections, contests that loomed thanks to the Independent Movement as the best and, possibly, the last chance for African Americans to regain political power on a statewide level. The gubernatorial race demanded greatest attention. The eventual Independent nominee Frank W. Pope, who had represented Madison County in the 1883 state senate thanks to black votes, benefited from close ties with many African American leaders. Against the possibility of that friendly face occupying the governor's chair ranged far starker images. Bourbons more and more insisted upon fundamental political change within the state by rewriting Florida's liberal 1868 constitution, and, as time passed and younger faces appeared within Democratic leadership ranks, the tone of party rhetoric hardened in harshness and increased in stridency when it came to matters related to race. The man who claimed the nomination in 1884, although he did not represent the trend toward more-youthful leadership, clearly symbolized the hard edge then developing. Edward A. Perry of Pensacola had ranked as a general in the Confederate army and, as a candidate, backed a constitutional convention wholeheartedly.<sup>40</sup>

All of the developments that were to result politically in Florida during 1884 could not have been foreseen in January, but key Independent advocates within the African American community realized that they faced a crossroads in the near future and grew convinced that they should attempt to unite the splintered black

39. *New York Freeman*, 23 May 1885; Ellis, "Nathan B. Young," 156-57; *Tallahassee Daily Democrat*, 20 July 1922; *Bulletin of Atlanta University* 34 (February 1892), 6.

40. Williamson, *Florida Politics*, 91, 104-119; Kingman, *Neither Dies Nor Surrenders*, 88-93.



vote by forging a consensus on essential goals, not simply advances that should be tallied in the event of victory but also positions from which there could be no retreat in case of defeat. Their mechanism appeared in the form of a call for a statewide “convention of the colored people of the state of Florida.” Robert Meacham had suggested such a plan as early as May 1882, observing that the assembly should consider “what is best to be done for our good in view of the present conditions of things.” The idea failed to resonate at the time, but attitudes changed in the next year and one-half. Mathew Lewey explained. “This meeting of the colored men of Florida was conceived, planned and brought into being by the brain and energy of Gen. J. T. Walls, ex-Congressman from this State, whose home is in the county in which the conference was held, supported by Hon. J. Willis Menard, editor of the [Key West] *Florida News*, absolutely upon the principle of Independentism—Independent of Bourbon-Democracy and supercilious Republicans whether white or black of this State.” Walls, Menard, Lewey, and others signed the call that Menard published in January.<sup>41</sup>

Education formed the centerpiece of the call’s list of grievances, but the nature of the goals to be reached now had changed dramatically from the grand and racially integrated initiatives undertaken a decade earlier by Governor Ossian B. Hart and Superintendent of Public Instruction Jonathan C. Gibbs. “We want increased facilities of common school education and the higher branches,” the call specified, “so as to be able to reduce the high rate of illiteracy which the last census shows to exist among our people.” Menard expanded upon the theme in a *Florida News* editorial. “The question of increased facilities of popular education for our children is paramount to all others,” he wrote, “because it is the prime lever in our elevation.” Menard continued: “We must contend for the same facilities and advantages of education which the whites enjoy, and make this the main plank in our political policy. If we must have separate schools and separate [railroad] cars, let them have the same conveniences and advantages as those provided for the whites.” He concluded, “‘The same accommodations for the same money,’ should be our watchword.”<sup>42</sup>

41. *Jacksonville Daily Florida Union*, 16 May 1882; *New York Globe*, 9, 16 February, 15 March 1884.

42. *New York Globe*, 15 March 1884; *Key West Florida News*, quoted in *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 7 February 1884.

While some Republican infighting marked the proceedings that convened at Gainesville on February fifth, the convention mostly resulted in amicable cooperation. Menard convened the gathering but soon surrendered the gavel to young James Dean. An Ocala native, he had attended Cookman Institute before earning bachelor's and master's degrees in law at Howard University, "being the valedictorian of the class in every case." Thomas V. Gibbs similarly surrendered his duties as temporary secretary to permanent choice Matthew M. Lewey. Peter Bryant, John Wallace, and ex-congressman Walls participated actively. Joseph E. Lee did manage to wrangle from the gathering a statement of "appreciation and high regard for the National Administration, at the head of which stands Chester A. Arthur, the life-long friend of our people," but the Independents considered the results, including adoption of the education language of the call and creation of a state executive committee to be chaired by Walls a victory. Gibbs reflected a sense of the optimism held by delegates as they departed Gainesville. "As a body it represented the brain and progressive sentiment of the black men of Florida, doing in quiet an amount of business in a day that astonished all lookers on" he informed his friend T. Thomas Fortune at the *New York Globe*. Gibbs added, "It will stand for all time in this State as a monument to the progress of the race."<sup>43</sup>

Elections concluded in the aftermath of the 1884 convention unfortunately resulted disastrously for African Americans in Florida, and that they did so altered the course by which the state was to arrive at a State Normal School and the philosophy toward which it would be oriented. On a national level, Democrat Grover Cleveland captured the presidency, a fact that meant many African American leaders—such as Menard, who held a position in the Key West customs house, and Gibbs, who had labored at the Jacksonville internal revenue collections office for a short while—would lose their federal jobs as of spring 1885. Faced with the income loss, Menard chose to relocate his newspaper to Jacksonville, where greater opportunities appeared to beckon. Soon, he had renamed the organ as the *Southern Leader* and

43. *Jacksonville Daily Florida Union*, 16 May 1882; *The Proceedings of the State Conference of the Colored Men of Florida Held at Gainesville, February 5, 1884* (Washington, D.C., 1884), 1-8; *Key West Daily Equator & Democrat*, March 1889 (Trade Edition); *New York Globe*, 16 February, 15 March 1884.

installed his son-in-law Gibbs as his associate editor. Gibbs meanwhile had won election to the state house of representatives from Duval County and, within a short time, would claim a delegate's seat in the 1885 constitutional convention, an assembly that came as another result of the 1884 elections. Thus, as of early 1885, Menard and Gibbs possessed ample reason for locating a state normal school, if one was to be created, in Jacksonville and at Stanton, where Menard's wife Edith had taught during the 1870s.<sup>44</sup>

Races for statewide offices had brought other bad news. Although the Independent gubernatorial candidate Pope had run a good race, Democrat Perry won with a decisive majority. His supporters dominated the legislature and, within a very short time, the state supreme court. Voters sent almost enough African American representatives and senators to Tallahassee to equal their strength in 1868, but fortuitously Matthew M. Lewey did not appear among them. While pursuing his Independent course, he had lost touch with his constituency. As a result Joseph Newman Clinton, a Lincoln University graduate and former Union Academy teacher, had turned the legislator out of office. Lewey's friend and mentor Josiah Walls faced defeat as well. He had run for the United States House of Representatives against incumbent Republican Horatio Bisbee, only to see Democrat Charles Dougherty snatch the prize. No Republican again would sit in the Congress from Florida for three generations, and the principal advocate of locating a state normal school at Union Academy essentially had disappeared from the political scene.<sup>45</sup>

The 1885 legislature pondered matters of significance, but while all eyes looked forward to the summer's meeting of the constitutional convention, the solons took no action to create a state normal school. Gibbs scored a success, however, in securing legislative endorsement of the federal Blair Education Act, a measure sponsored by Senator Henry W. Blair of New Hampshire, that, if

44. Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 57-58; Rivers and Brown, "John Willis Menard and *Lays in Summer Lands*," 112-13; Shofner, "Florida," 94; *New York Freeman*, 11 April 1885; *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, 9 December 1884; *Jacksonville Tri-Weekly Florida Union*, 2 May 1874.

45. Williamson, *Florida Politics*, 122-28; Walter W. Manley II, Canter Brown, Jr., and Eric W. Rise, *The Supreme Court of Florida and Its Predecessor Courts, 1821-1917* (Gainesville, Fla., 1997), 266-68, 271-72; Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 57-58; *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, 9 December 1884; Brown and Brown, *Family Records*, 58.

passed, would have allocated millions of dollars to eradicating illiteracy through programs in which black students were guaranteed equality in benefits. Having come close to senate passage in 1884, the bill appeared likely to be considered favorably in the near future. Gibbs thus anticipated a deluge of new school funds that would have required the education and employment in Florida of hundreds, if not thousands, of new minority educators.<sup>46</sup>

That left the need to ensure that the constitutional convention, largely Bourbon in composition, did nothing to undercut public education or to forestall legislative creation of a state normal school. At the conclave, seven delegates claimed seats. None represented Alachua. Senator Henry W. Chandler sat for Marion, while only Gibbs resided in Duval. Three individuals—Wallace B. Carr, a prosperous farmer; John W. Mitchell, an attorney; and William F. Thompson, a school teacher who also practiced law—lived in Leon. The sixth delegate, Amos Hargrett, represented adjacent Wakulla County. Interestingly, John Wallace boarded with Thompson's family after returning from several years residence at Key West, where the veteran official had obtained a federal position and where he and Menard often had cooperated on political matters. At Tallahassee in 1885, Wallace worked on the first history of the state's Reconstruction experiences, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*. Thompson's brother, James D. Thompson, a former law partner of Wallace's, by summer 1885 practiced law at Pensacola with the man who may have taught Wallace in Virginia during the Civil War. Thomas DeSaliers Tucker had gone on from his teaching experience at Fortress Monroe to graduate from Oberlin College before earning a law degree from Straight University in 1882. He then had achieved admission to the bar of Florida early the next year.<sup>47</sup>

Surprising to most observers the black delegates and other Republicans managed to exert some influence on the rewritten

46. *New York Freeman*, 11 April 1885; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, La., 1951), 63-64.

47. Brown, *Florida's Black Public Officials*, 59, 79-80, 92, 111, 132; Young, "Florida's Pioneer African American Attorneys," 83-89; *1885 Florida State Census, Leon County* (population schedule) (available on microfilm at State Library of Florida, Tallahassee); Clark, "John Wallace," 417-18; *Tallahassee Land of Flowers*, 15 September 1883; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 17 January 1884; John Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida: The Inside Workings of the Reconstruction of Civil Government in Florida after the Close of the Civil War* (Jacksonville, Fla., 1888); *Jacksonville New South*, 12 August 1874.

state charter when it came to education, and the results spoke for themselves. Credit for this mostly went to William N. Sheats, the Alachua County school superintendent who served as chairman of the education committee, and William D. Bloxham, the former governor who now held Jonathan C. Gibbs's old cabinet position as Florida's secretary of state. With Republican votes they overcame tumultuous Bourbon opposition so that Sheats could craft an education article that, while mandating racial segregation in public schools, guaranteed "a uniform system of free public schools" and required the legislature "to provide for the liberal maintenance of the same." To undergird the financial commitment, Sheats's article created a permanent school fund with dedicated revenue. Probably in response to entreaties from Gibbs and other black delegates, Sheats added a provision that specified: "The legislature at its first session shall provide for the establishment, maintenance, and management of such normal schools, not to exceed two, as the interest of public education may demand." As finally approved the new constitution also authorized the legislature to impose a poll tax as a prerequisite to voter registration, a step clearly aimed at black voters. But, the document dedicated revenues from any such tax to public education.<sup>48</sup>

Many black leaders, including Gibbs, viewed the proposed constitution's education article as a triumph. "The impress of the Liberals is indelibly stamped upon the article on education," he expressed that September in the *New York Freeman*. "As a whole it compares favorably with any educational provision in any constitution in the United States, as far as my observation goes." He went on to observe: "The principal of the State fund is inviolate, only the interest being available. In addition to this there is a one mill tax on all taxable property in the State. The county fund shall be not less than three or more than five mills, the net proceeds of all fines collected under the penal laws of the State within the county and all capitation taxes. Each county may be sub-divided into school districts, and each district may by a vote assess a tax of not more than three mills for district school purposes." Gibbs concluded, "Lastly, it provides that all distribution of funds shall be equitable, that white and colored children shall not be taught in the same

48. Edward C. Williamson, "The Constitutional Convention of 1885," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 41 (October 1962), 120, 122-25; idem, *Florida Politics*, 138-39; Neyland, *History*, 4-5; Howie, "State Politics," 47-49.

school, but that impartial provision shall be made for both, and that a normal school shall be opened for the colored as well as white youth." It may even be that Gibbs and other black delegates consciously traded the poll tax for the school provisions. Gibbs offered a minority report against the tax and expressed public opposition but did little behind the scenes to forestall the measure. William F. Thompson actually voted for it. Each of the men, in any event, likely agreed with Gibbs's take on the matter. "The poll tax was left to the Legislature," he declared, "which will never impose it."<sup>49</sup>

As far as Gibbs and his father-in-law Menard were concerned, the normal school authorized for African Americans belonged at Stanton in Jacksonville, and, with friends and allies, they proceeded to set the stage just as Matthew Lewey had attempted to do at Gainesville a year or two earlier. The voters would not determine the new constitution's fate until November 1886, a fact that afforded them some time to implement their plans. Even before the convention's adjournment, they had acted to terminate principal Daniel Wallace Culp and replace him with a close friend and professional associate of Menard's named William Middleton Artrell. A native of the Bahamas, he had been educated at the Boys' Central School in Nassau. At Key West by 1870, the teacher emerged as principal of the city's respected Douglass School. His credentials as an educator and administrator thus established, Artrell extended his influence through much of the state and around the nation through highly successful work as a leader of the International Order of Good Templars, an organization that stressed the moral and personal benefits of temperance. At almost the same time that he accepted Stanton's principal's position, Artrell bested Joseph E. Lee to become Florida's Chief Grand Templar, a milestone that doubtlessly further endeared him to Menard.<sup>50</sup>

With Artrell in place by August 1885, plans moved forward. First, new teachers immediately were added to the faculty so that

49. *New York Freeman*, 12 September 1885; Williamson, "Constitutional Convention," 123; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 19, 22 July 1885.

50. *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 21 July, 27 August 1885; *Birmingham (Eng.) Good Templars' Watchword*, 12 March 1879, 12 October 1885; David M. Fahey, *Temperance and Racism: John Bull, Johnny Reb, and the Good Templars* (Lexington, Ky., 1996), 120-24.

Stanton could claim precedence as “the largest colored school in the State, having seven assistants.” Then, those working to position the school attempted to refine its mission in line with current trends of educational philosophy, particularly those increasingly articulated from Tuskegee by Booker T. Washington. Menard, for one, utilized the columns of the *Southern Leader* to stress the importance of education combined with “self-development” to “the elevation of the race,” as well as the vital nature of vocational training. “Time and bitter lessons of experience have convinced her people that labor is more valuable and honorable than chivalry,” he observed in March 1886, “and that widespread development and varied industrial enterprise is more desirable and conducive to happiness than the narrow, old feudal system.” Later, he added, “While good teachers and preachers are badly needed, it must be remembered that an educated and successful farmer, mechanic, or merchant does as much good for his race as the teacher.” Subsequent actions of son-in-law Gibbs suggest the he dissented from Menard’s emphasis on the Tuskegee model, but a white ally of the editor, state school superintendent Albert J. Russell, did not. He joined with Artrell to solicit a major allocation from the Slater Fund to underwrite an “industrial department” at Stanton. Russell announced success only weeks before the legislature’s scheduled meeting time in 1887.<sup>51</sup>

Given that the voters had approved the new constitution in November 1886, it must have appeared to Gibbs as he traveled to Tallahassee for the spring 1887 legislative session that the opening of a state normal school at Jacksonville seemed assured. Governor Perry even helped to pave the way when he endorsed “the introduction into our school system of some degree of manual training and industrial teaching,” while asserting that, when it came to normal schools, “the expenditure for their maintenance is a wise one.” After that, complications began to appear. Conservatives offered an early attempt to limit normal school creation to a single institution for whites. Gibbs responded with a bill to mandate one white and one black school but without specifying the location of either. A white friend and fellow Republican, Charles F. A. Bielby of DeLand, then submitted an additional bill that placed the white

51. Birmingham (Eng.) *Good Templars’ Watchword*, 12 October 1885; *Jacksonville Southern Leader*, quoted in *New York Freeman*, 27 March 1886; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 20, 4 March 1887; *Cleveland Gazette*, 2 July 1887.

normal school at Gainesville and the black institution at Jacksonville. Meanwhile, Senator A. R. Jones of Walton County introduced Senate Bill No. 103 that also provided for creation of two schools. The senate acted first. Its education committee backed Tallahassee for the black institution, but Marion County Senator Henry W. Chandler managed to amend the bill on the floor to substitute Ocala and, by inference, Howard Academy. The senate bill reached the house on May twenty-third. Alachua's delegation fought to obtain both schools, while partisans of Ocala urged adoption of the senate position. Other towns, including Macclenny bid for the school. For several days, confusion reigned on the subject.<sup>52</sup>

In the end, the irresistible weight of politics and numbers ruled the day. To untangle the house from the confusion, speaker George H. Browne authorized the body's black representatives to meet as a committee to decide the question. The chamber contained only seven such individuals, half the number of two years previously. Four of the men represented Leon County: John W. Mitchell, Wallace B. Carr, Samuel Frazier, and Clinton Snead. Together with chairman Peter H. Davidson, Jr., of the governor's home county of Escambia, they issued on May 27 a majority report favoring Tallahassee. Probably with more than a little wry humor, they justified their decision to exclude Jacksonville by deeming it unwise or inexpedient "to locate the said school in any seaport town of this State, because of the epidemic diseases frequently prevalent in those cities, and also because of the evil example so apt to be set in seaport towns by the conditions that surround the numerous saloons and gambling places usually found in numbers in those towns, all of which tend to lead astray the persons who will attend the schools and who should, as much as possible, be kept aloof from these places." John Mitchell offered the official amendment to the senate bill necessary to alter Ocala to Tallahassee, although Thomas V. Gibbs "spoke forcibly in favor of Jacksonville as the most suitable place for the colored normal school." The house backed Mitchell, though, and the senate subsequently concurred. The matter thereupon was settled.<sup>53</sup>

52. *Florida House Journal* (1887), 17, 184, 558, 650; *Florida Senate Journal* (1887), 481, 556, 569-70, 576; Neyland, *History*, 8-9; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 6 February 1889.

53. *Florida House Journal* (1887), 651-83; *New York Freeman*, 23 April 1887; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, 28, 30 May 1887; Neyland, *History*, 9-10.



It remained for the State Board of Education to select a president and faculty to implement the program that most thought appropriate for the new normal school, a vocationally oriented curriculum similar to the Tuskegee model. Effectively, this meant that Governor Perry and Superintendent Russell needed to act. Perry, a resident of Pensacola, certainly was acquainted with Thomas DeSaliers Tucker and may have anticipated selecting him as school president all along. Reginald Ellis, on the other hand, has suggested that John Wallace and Josiah Walls, Tucker's former students, brought the teacher and attorney to Secretary of State Bloxham's attention and that Bloxham, in turn, paved the way with Perry for Tucker. Peter H. Davidson, whose family enjoyed deep roots in Pensacola, also may have played a part. However Perry came to fix on Tucker, the governor had to convince him "through personal persuasion" to "abandon a good law practice and accept the presidency." In July the state board officially offered Tucker the job with John Willis Menard's approval. "The State Board of Education certainly deserves much credit for the appointment recently made for this school," he announced in the *Southern Leader*. "We have known Professor Tucker for about eighteen years, and we have never met a more genial, broad-minded and sterling gentleman." Menard added. "He possesses first-class qualities as friend, gentleman and a scholar, and commands the respect of all who know him. He is a strong man morally and intellectually and the new normal school has a security of success under his charge." Menard likewise agreed with the selection of Thomas V. Gibbs as vice president and first assistant instructor. There, Superintendent Russell had proved to possess the decisive voice. Tucker and Gibbs met for the first time in Tallahassee shortly before the State Normal School for Colored Students opened for students on October 3, 1887.<sup>54</sup>

Those two appointments, made doubtlessly with confidence by Perry and Russell, ironically frustrated the intent that they were meant to serve. Florida had placed two Oberlin College men in charge of their own teacher training institution. As they set about creating the best teacher training course that they could conceive, they did so based not so much upon the Tuskegee vocational model as upon the liberal arts tradition of their alma mater. First

54. Ellis, "Nathan B. Young," 155; Neyland, *History*, 11-14; *New York Freeman*, 12 March, 24 September 1887; *Jacksonville Evening Metropolis*, 19 June 1903.

hires in the years that followed principally were graduates of northern schools who shared the approach. Thus, it would be said of Ida Gibbs, added to the faculty in 1891, “[She] is an able teacher, a graduate from Oberlin College and a classic student.” For fourteen years President Tucker stuck to his mission as best he could until dismissed in 1901 essentially for refusal to surrender the liberal arts tradition. His successor Nathan B. Young, a protégé of Booker T. Washington and former Tuskegee faculty member, also came to Tallahassee trained by Oberlin, where he had received bachelor’s (1888) and master’s (1891) degrees. He continued to adhere as closely as he could to the State Normal School’s tradition of liberal arts education for teachers until he, too, lost his job for the effort in 1923. “I refused to sneeze when the local Federal Vocation agents took snuff,” Young recorded. “I refused to endorse their program for this college.” Young added: “This is the way the South treats Negroes who are men once it gets them in its power. There are few colored state schools left in the South whose presidents dare to call their souls their own.” At what became Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, presidents and faculty members did, as Young suggested, dare to call their souls their own. A unique institution and the nation’s largest minority teacher education program, still tied closely today to the liberal arts tradition, flowed directly from their courage and their determination.<sup>55</sup>

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55. Ellis, “Nathan B. Young,” 156-69; Monroe Alphas Majors, *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities*.