

IMMANUEL COMMUNITY
1870 - 1980

by
Thomas Phillips, Sr.
S. V. Clemmons
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(Editor's Note: Only an insignificant number of items have appeared in the BULLETIN relating to black heritage and history in Arkansas county. As the Immanuel school and the Immanuel community that nurtured and supported it touched a majority of the continuing black families in the county for more than half a century, Rev. Thomas O. Phillips, Sr., a member of GPHS and principal of Immanuel Christian School, was asked to prepare an article about Immanuel. It is planned to be the beginning of an ongoing series relating to black history of the area served by the Grand Prairie Historical Society.

Rev. Phillips's roots are deep in Arkansas county. The ordination license of his great grandfather was entered in Deed Record Y:426 at DeWitt 1 Sept 1876: " ... Brother James Phillips of Arkansas Co., Ark., was ordained to the work of the Gospel ministry ... 28th day of August A.D. 1876 ... by the Colored Baptist Church of Arkansas Co.... " As a graduate of the Immanuel High School and lifelong resident of the area, he writes from personal observation and experiences.

Co-authors S. V. Clemmons and O. B. Elders, Sr. have long records of leadership, service and residential tenure in Arkansas Co. The CLEMMONS surname is found in Crockett township as early as 1870. A retired farmer, Mr. Clemmons was for many years President of the Negro Division of the Arkansas County Farm Bureau. Immanuel was one of the public schools served by Mr. Elders during his many years as a school administrator. He was associated with UAPB for several years before retirement and still assists in student recruitment for the Pine Bluff facility.) *****

Immanuel was first a dream in the hearts and minds of black men and women of post Civil War Arkansas county. The dream had no name in the beginning. When materialized, it was located approximately five miles due east of Almyra.

Interviews with elder citizens of Immanuel and Arkansas county indicate that black families had begun to settle in this vicinity as early as the 1870's. The real estate and tax records at DeWitt show land ownership by black families there dating as far back as the 1890's.

Many of the families in the turn of the century county records and the 1900 Federal census have descendants still living in the community. Surnames of early settlers who have made substantial

contributions to the Immanuel community include:

Abernathy	Elders	Kimball
Age	Gaither	Mallock
Brown	Garrison	Malone
Butler	Gunnell	Montgomery
Burton	Hancock	O'Neal
Child	Jefferies	Osborne
Clemmons	Jemerson	Phillips
Cole	Jennings	Reaves
Cornelius	Johnson	Ransom
Crockett	Jones	Smith
Dunn	Keaton	Washington
		Wofford

It was in the local churches dotting the eastern side of Arkansas county that this nebulous dream began to take shape. These churches sustained and renewed their congregations as they struggled with the many altered aspects of life as freedmen and freedwomen. Out of the struggling came a conviction that education was the path to attainment of the dream for the improved quality of life they dared to hope now was achievable for their race...education founded on Christian principals that would prepare black children to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world and to grasp even the smallest of opportunities.

Organization of the White River District Association
of Missionary Baptist Churches

In unity there is strength. The White River District Association of Missionary Baptist Churches was organized in Arkansas county in 1880. Organizing churches and their pastors were: (1)

New Hope	Rev. W. S. Payne
St. John	Rev. M. S. Butler
Hopewell, St. Charles	
St. Olive	Rev. James Phillips
Poplar Creek	Rev. M. H. Stiggers
Wofford Chapel	Rev. P. A. Garrison
Mt. Pisgby	Rev. Geo. Humphrey
Liberty, Lookout	Rev. Joe Hubbard
St. Paul	
First Baptist, Stuttgart	Rev. J. A. Keeble
Second Baptist, Stuttgart	Rev. S. W. Taylor
First Baptist, DeWitt	
Love Rest, Arkansas Post	Rev. Jesse Riley
Mt. Calvary, Gillett	Rev. J. E. Bass
Lone Star, Tichnor	Rev. David Redmond

Rev. W. S. Payne was elected Moderator; Prof. Arthur Ferguson, Secretary; Prof. W. A. Johnson, Treasurer. The fifteen trustees of the newly organized association were: Charley Ryan, Frank Dodson,

Charley Elders, C. C. Butler, Willis Hearne, Joshua Phillips, Hamp Clemmons, Bennett Dunn, Will Montgomery, Raphael Hancock, Charley Flowers, Henry Simmons, Cornelius Echols, Harry Brown and Richard Bass.

Development of the Immanuel Education System

Organized education in the area that was to become known as Immanuel began in the Church under the supervision of the local Baptist churches. In the decades before and after the turn of the century a school called Walnut Grove was maintained approximately three miles north of the present school site. Since most of the families were farmers, the Walnut Grove school term was adjusted to the planting and harvesting seasons because of the big role the students played in the farming process.

During the years the Walnut Grove school was open the member churches of the White River District Association were working and saving to purchase land for the new school to implement the dream. Finally, in February of 1904, having saved the negotiated sum of \$200.00, "W. S. Payne, P. A. Garrison and N. A. Johnson, Trustees of the White River District Association" bought from Moses Katz and wife forty (40) acres, being "the southeast quarter of the southwest quarter of Sec 27 T3S R3W". (2)

The forty acres was mostly timber. It required nearly five more years to clear the land and sell enough timber and wood to begin a building program. When the main structure, a two-story frame building with classrooms, chapel, dining room and kitchen downstairs and dormitory facilities for women and girls upstairs, was completed, nearby a four room cottage to house men and boys was built. About 1910 the school was ready to open. The Walnut Grove students were transferred in and recruitment begun for additional pupils.

The name selected for the new facility was Immanuel Industrial Institute--Immanuel, meaning "God With Us", attesting to the source of the strength and motivation of these early Christian leaders; Industrial, for the skills to be taught that would enhance the quality of life.

Enrollment increased to as many as one hundred students some years. There were dormitory facilities and opportunities for some of the students to earn their expenses by working on the school farm. Five other counties were represented in the student bodies--Lee, Jefferson, Monroe, Phillips and St. Francis. The curriculum included blacksmithing, carpentry, broom-making, painting, and upholstery, in addition to art, music and the humanities. During the first decade of operation, a broom factory was operated in connection with the school. This not only contributed financially to the school but helped the economy of the black farmers in the county who produced the broom straw.

The school continued as a missionary outreach of the churches

of the White River District Association until the early 1920's when all of Arkansas county was plunged into economic chaos by the low market prices for farm produce. The agriculturally supported school was particularly vulnerable. Operation funds dwindled forcing first shorter terms and, finally, closing.

Under the leadership of P. A. Garrison, T. S. Clemmons, Bud Payne, Dan Baker, and Tom Washington means for obtaining funds to resume operation were sought. The first step in the change of Immanuel school from a private to a public facility was taken in the fall of 1923. P. A. Garrison, N. A. Johnson and S. E. Ryan, "officers and legal trustees of the real estate owned by the White River District Association" deeded two acres of the forty bought in 1904 from Moses Katz "for a colored public school site on which a Rosenwald building (3) is to be erected in connection with the school work of Immanuel Industrial Institute". (4)

Transition to public school status was complete when the County Court at the 1924 February term approved the petition of "B. B. Dunn, P. A. Garrison and others" for the formation of "Colored School District No. 70" combining "the entire colored population" of Districts No. 18 (Brough) and No. 24 (Needmore). P. A. Garrison, J. S. Clemmons and R. H. Ryan were appointed directors of the new district. (5) Arkansas county's third Rosenwald school was built and the conversion of the existing two-story building to one-story under the supervision of County Superintendent J. M. Henderson was completed by 1927. (6) The first eight grades were taught and enrollment by 1929 was 124 pupils. (7)

And then came the Great Depression. The minutes of the White River District Association indicate early closure of the school for lack of funds periodically in the 1930's and beginning of the 1940's. Old records in the County School Supervisor's office tell that in 1931 Immanuel Institute (District No. 70) has a 120 day term of the first nine grades with 136 pupils. In 1936 four teachers taught grades 1-9 at Immanuel and St. Olive (both District No. 70) to an average daily attendance of 106 pupils for 140 days. (8)

The first application for vocational agriculture and home economics program for a black school in Arkansas county was made by O. B. Elders as Principal of Immanuel. The DeWitt district also applied but lacked the facilities. To implement the program the patrons of District No. 70 voted a six mill building tax in February of 1941 and the next month "Immanuel School District No. 70 of Arkansas County" pledged as collateral to the State Commissioner of Education (representing the State of Arkansas) the two acres of the Immanuel campus to secure the loan of \$600.00 to construct the required buildings. The loan was to be repaid with interest within ten years during which time insurance and maintenance of all the facilities on the site was to be underwritten by the district. (9)

Ed O'Neal was given the contract to build a shop and home economics building under the supervision of the National Youth Administration. (10) The name was changed from Immanuel Industrial Institute to Immanuel Vocational Institute. In 1944 the total enrollment was 164 pupils--116 in grades 1-8 and 49 in grades 9-12. By 1947 enrollment had dropped to 95 pupils in grades 1-8 and 42 in the high school.

In December of 1947 the Arkansas County Court dissolved School District No. 61 (Mt. Pisgah) and No. 72 (Dewberry) and annexed their territory "as of 17 March 1948" to Immanuel District No. 70, stating "The County Board of Education believes for best educational advantages of all and recommends that a nine grade Jr. High School be maintained at the site of present Dewberry and a 12 year High School now operated be continued at the Immanuel school site". (11) The school operated 159 days in 1948-49 with a total enrollment of 357 pupils--292 elementary and 65 high school.

And then came consolidation. In July of 1949 the Commissioner of Education of the State of Arkansas filed a release deed at DeWitt to Immanuel School District No. 70 for the two-acre campus site "as indebtedness paid in full". (12) This early repayment of the loan had paved the way for the formation of Arkansas County School District No. 73 to be headquartered on the Immanuel campus the month before. Directors of the new district appointed by the County Court were R. L. Phillips, Immanuel, Tom Hill, St. Olive, Spurgeon Cunningham, Lookout, and John Lamb, Mt. Pisgah. T. I. Gaither was subsequently elected to represent the Poplar Creek area. The scope of the district was further enlarged by the approval of the State Board of Education for the annexation of "Immanuel School District in Prairie and Monroe County to Immanuel School District in Arkansas County". (13)

The involvement in and the dedication of the White River District Association of Missionary Baptist Churches to the growth and expansion of the Immanuel school is attested by the deed dated 23 July 1949 wherein "J. E. McSwain, Moderator, Bert Vinson, Treas., and J. S. Clemmons, Sec., of the White River Baptist Association ... for \$1.00 and other valuable considerations" ... convey to "Arkansas County School District No. 73 ... south half of southeast quarter of southwest quarter (20 acres) of Sec 27 T3S R3W ... for colored school purposes ..." (14)

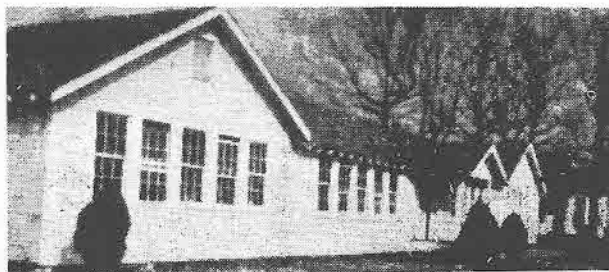
The first Federal Farm Board contract for vocational agriculture and home economics education for a Black school in Arkansas county followed. Participants in the negotiation were Paul Petty, Arkansas County Supervisor of Education, J. S. Woodard of A.M.&N. College (now UAPB), L. G. Standfield, Principal of Immanuel Vocational School, and O. B. Elders, Sr. The school now had a firm economic operational base with county, state and federal funds augmenting the continuing Church support.

In 1950-51 Arkansas County School District No. 73 employed fourteen teachers--three elementary and seven high school at Immanuel and four in the Lookout and Poplar Creek wing schools. Lookout had an eight grade school and Poplar Creek, six grades. The total enrollment for District No. 73 was 506 pupils. There were 170 pupils in grades 7-12 at Immanuel. By 1954-55 only one wing school, Lookout, was being maintained for 51 students in grades 1-6 with two teachers. This term Immanuel had twelve teachers and a total enrollment of 289 pupils--122 in grades 1-6 and 167 in grades 7-12. In 1965 the Immanuel Vocational Institute operated nine months with 17 teachers serving a total of 390 pupils--115 in grades 1-6 and 275 in grades 7-12, including senior high school students from DeWitt, St. Charles, Gillett and Stuttgart. (15)

And then came desegregation. A law was passed prohibiting school districts from transporting students over their boundary lines. Arkansas County School District No. 73, operating from the Immanuel campus, did not have a sufficient number of students to support a senior high school. Records of the Arkansas County Court of May 1966 tell of the dissolution of District No. 73 with the assignment of the Immanuel community area to DeWitt, Lookout community area to Stuttgart, Poplar Creek area to St. Charles, and the Monroe county area to Clarendon. (16) The Immanuel Vocational Institute, Almyra, Arkansas, was closed.

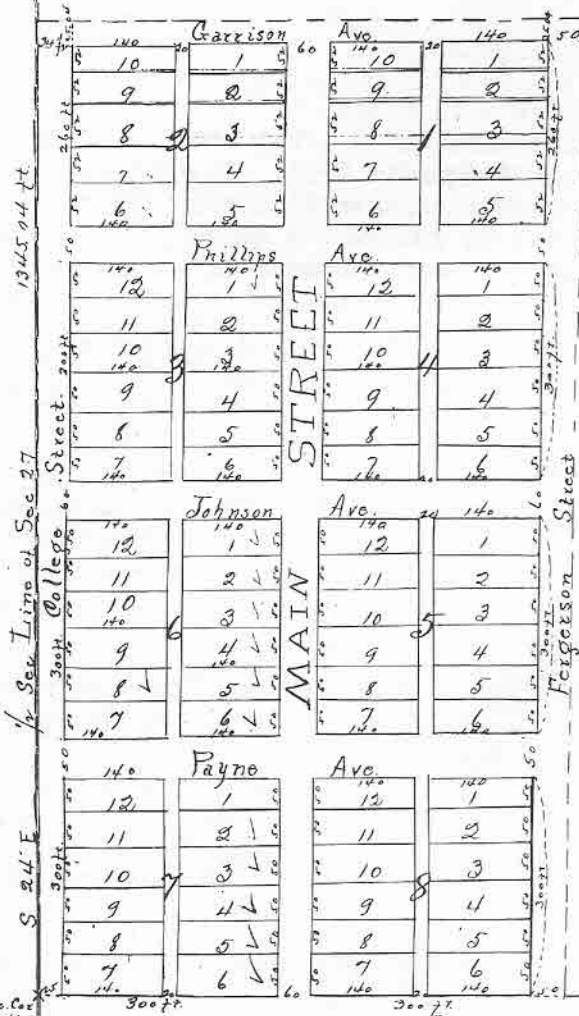
The administrative heads of the Immanuel School from the opening until the 1966 closing were: Rev. P. A. Garrison, H. Driver, D. B. Marshall, C. C. Butler, Miles Butler, Henry Wright, J. Kent, L. R. McNeil, J. H. Bankhead, O. B. Elders, Sr., Brooks Williams, Jesse Mason, L. G. Standfield, Elijah Coleman, A. Tate, L. Harris, Mrs. Marie Fitzpatrick, J. S. Clemmons, E. E. Bogan, Mrs. M. C. Arrant, F. W. Smith, P. C. Faison, Timothy Young, Clyde O'Neal and Johnnie Phillips.

The graduates of Immanuel, with their rich heritage, have gone the world over and rightfully taken their roles as dynamic leaders because a school of this nature was born of the dreams and struggles of black freedmen and women more than a century ago and sustained by the dedication and guidance of subsequent generations.



Administration Building
Immanuel Vocational Institute

Plat of IMMANUEL, ARK.



E 1/2 of SW 1/4 SE 1/4
Sec. 27 T. 3S. R. 3W.

Sec. Line between Sec. 27 & 34 T3S. R3W.

1/4 Sec. Co.
27-34
T3S. R3W

I, Logan Fitzhugh, do hereby certify that I did, on Aug. 12th & 13th, 1912, survey, locate and establish the lines & boundaries of Immanuel, Ark., which is described as follows: The SE 1/4 of the SW 1/4 of the NE 1/4 section 27, T3S. R3W. This divided into lots, blocks, streets and alleys. All blocks are numbered from one to eight inclusive. And are 300 ft. square except blocks One & Two which are 300 ft. east & west & 260 ft. North & South. All lots are numbered from 1 to 12 inclusive except lots in Block 1 & 2 which are numbered from 1 to 10 inclusive. All lots are 50 ft. by 140 ft. except in Block 1 & 2 in which the lots are 52 ft. by 140 ft. All alleys are 20 ft. wide & run North & South. Main Street & Johnson Ave. are 60 ft. wide, Payne Ave. & Phillips Ave. are 50 ft. wide, Ferguson Street is 50 ft. wide, Garrison Ave. is 25 ft. wide. Witness my hand this 20th day of Aug. 1912 at St. Louis, Mo. Logan Fitzhugh, Co. Surveyor.

Declination 4° 48' E

The Local Church in the Immanuel Community

Rev. P. A. Garrison began holding Sunday School services in the chapel of the first school building on the Immanuel site as soon as it was completed. A congregation developed around this nucleus... The Providence Missionary Baptist Church organized in 1910. A house of worship was soon constructed adjacent to the northern boundary of the school site.

The Providence Church became a member of the White River District Association and continues to this day in the same location. Chapel services were regularly held on the campus until the school passed from local control with the application for state and federal funding.

The Town of Immanuel

The institutions basic to the development of a town were operational about 1910. The Immanuel Home Improvement Association was organized to promote the growth of the village. A town site was surveyed by Logan Fitzhugh in August of 1912. (17)

The alleys and streets of the town of Immanuel were dedicated by W. P. Mays, N. A. Johnson, and P. A. Garrison, "Trustees of the Immanuel Home Improvement Association" and the plat duly recorded on 26 April 1913. (18)

The early families worked in the farm fields as share croppers, hired laborers, or purchased land and became self-employed. Even the professional (preachers, teachers, skilled craftsmen) worked the fields part-time.

The town was never organized and remained a widely scattered, loosely knit community of families dedicated to the improvement of all phases of black life in Arkansas county.

Because the majority of the families were engaged in farming, Immanuel's citizens joined with other black farmers in the county to improve purchasing and marketing practices through the organization of the Stock-holders Union of the Farmers Conference of Arkansas County. John Cole was president and S. V. Clemmons chairman of the Board of Trustees. Other members of the board were: John Brown, Joe Washington, Rev. J. H. Holt, Edmond Gunnell, Charley Dodson, Tate Horn, George Lee, Ed Thomason, Gabe Hogan, Enoch Horner, Allen Betts, Jim Moore, Jimmie Hauser, Sam Boatner, Jim Fallon, Henry Simms, Tommie Daniels, Martin Montgomery, Thomas Smith, Alex Montgomery, S. E. Ryan, Mose Jennings, Jess Hancock, Jack Kimball, Tom Graham, T. R. Ryans, Ruthus Graham, Bent Wofford, Henry Heyman, E. Crockett, Milton Bradford and Will Rodgers.

The services rendered by this organization to the farmers was later taken over by the organization of the Negro Division of the Arkansas County Farm Bureau.

The School at Immanuel Today

In 1978 a school again opened its doors to the public on the Immanuel site--a Christian school rising to meet the needs of the Immanuel community and Arkansas county, under the leadership of Rev. Thomas O. Phillips, Sr. of the Providence Missionary Baptist Church.

The name "Immanuel Christian School" was chosen. As with the first school operated on the site, the Bible is the major textbook. Rev. Phillips, Principal and teacher, like many parents of today who have become disenchanted with the education, training and discipline in the public schools, believes that God's word has the answer to many of the problems confronting America today. The school is open to both boys and girls who can meet the qualifications and are ready to live by Christian principles.

The Immanuel Christian School curriculum is individualized and Christian-centered, covering all areas of discipline to equip students to be worthwhile in today's society. The school motto of "God is with us" was chosen by the students after hearing Rev. P. H. Payne, son of W. S. Payne, one of the founders of Immanuel, speak regarding the true meaning of Immanuel: "Immanuel is a word spoken by the Spirit of God, meaning 'God With Us'; the I should never be replaced with an E for I denotes one God, in the God-head (Trinity), whereas with an E the meaning becomes many gods."

The Immanuel Christian School Council was activated in the summer of 1978 with Scipio Wofford, Casscoe, as chairman and Mrs. Lucy Jemerson, secretary-treasurer. Other Council members are Amos Jones, Mrs. America Jones, Mrs. Emma Smith, Mrs. Winnie Caldwell, Mrs. Pauline Phillips and the Rev. Phillips. The Immanuel Christian School is a ministry of the Providence Missionary Baptist Church of the White River District of Missionary Baptist Churches.

Opportunities for work, growth and development in body, mind and spirit are incorporated in the program of the Immanuel Christian School, carrying forward into a second century the dream of Immanuel's founders for a better quality of life for black Americans.

References and Annotations by Dorothy J. Core

- (1) The pastors of some of the churches had not been accurately determined at the time of writing.
- (2) The deed for the land by "Moses Katz and Ellen D. Katz, his wife" is dated 12 Feb 1904. It was recorded in Deed Record L No. 4:57 at DeWitt in 1907.
- (3) This Rosenwald School was one of more than 5,000 rural black schools funded by the Rosenwald Fund, a sum of money set aside "to improve the opportunities and living conditions of Negroes in America". It was created in 1917 by Julius Rosenwald, an American merchant and philanthropist, who accumulated the greater

portion of his fortune as head of Sears, Roebuck & Co. A unique feature of the Fund was the stipulation by Rosenwald that the entire fund was to be spent within 25 years of his death (which occurred in 1932). A total of \$22,500.00 was dispensed to various causes before the activities of the Julius Rosenwald Fund ended in June of 1948.

- (4) Deed is dated 1 Oct 1923. It is recorded in Deed Record B23:525 at DeWitt.
- (5) The original petition could not be located that would have shown all the details. The basic petition is recorded County Court Record T:410, 11.
- (6) School Warrant Book N shows that in 1927 J. I. Porter was paid \$220.00 for building materials and Will Montgomery, C. C. Cornelius and D. Washington, \$73.56 for painting Immanuel Industrial Institute.
- (7) Ibid., shows the state funds received were based on 124 pupils.
- (8) Mrs. Ruth Miller, County School Supervisor, graciously searched cabinets and files in her office to locate old records for examination.
- (9) This agreement, dated 1 March 1941, is recorded in Deed Record U No.6:103 at DeWitt.
- (10) The National Youth Administration was created by Executive Order in 1935 to furnish part time work for students in high schools and colleges. The purpose of the law was to relieve severe unemployment during the Great Depression. It was absorbed into the Federal Works Agency in 1943.
- (11) County Court Record B-2:394, 395
- (12) Release dated 7 July 1949 is recorded Deed Record G No.7:452.
- (13) County Court Record C-2:31, 32, 37-39
- (14) Recorded Deed Record G No.7:462 at DeWitt.
- (15) Statistics from old records helpfully located by Mrs. Miller, op. cit.
- (16) County Court Record F-2:96
- (17) Logan Fitzhugh had been principal of the Almyra school and was the first elected recorder of the Incorporated Town of Almyra.
- (18) Plat of Immanuel is recorded in Deed Record J No.5:1,2, DeWitt.

DeWitt NEW ERA, Thursday, 28 Apr 1910, p 3 col 2: "Misses Jane Scott and Beatrice Robbins of Hagler were NEW ERA callers last Monday. Miss Scott will leave Sunday for Cincinnati to take a course in telegraphy and shorthand in the National Telegraph Institute of that city. Miss Jane is one of our popular and successful teachers."

Stuttgart DAILY LEADER and ARKANSAWYER, 5 May 1938, p 4 col 3: "Almyra ... "The old building built by Dr. Laur, long years ago is being torn down by the owners, Mrs. Anna McLain and sons ..."