

## Untold Stories of Black Montevallo:

Vol. 2, No 5

### ALDRICH GRAMMAR SCHOOL IN 1898

Since this is Black History Month, it is exciting to be able to present new information about the Aldrich Grammar School. This announcement, which ran in the *Alabama Time-Piece* in 1898, provides a rare look at a local "negro" school's course of study and fairly bursts with insight into the yearning for real education felt by Aldrich's African American community at the turn of the century.

The curriculum might be said to embody aspirations summed up by this humorous "Resolved": "That we, as a colored race of people, strive to have our hearts filled with the love of God, our heads filled with education and our pockets filled with money" (*Bibb Co. Baptist Assn. Minutes*, 1893).

It shows the influence of the educational aims promoted by Tuskegee's Booker T. Washington, a man "who is nobody's fool," as contemporary poet Tyehimba Jess puts it, a "Race Ambassador who trained up teachers in troops." Aldrich instruction was remarkably comprehensive. It included instruction in basic literacy skills (penmanship, reading and writing) and mathematics (including bookkeeping), as well as broad forms of knowledge: geography, anatomy and physiology, and American history -- culminating in an emphasis on "Negro history." Racial pride was part of the curriculum.

The principal of the school, B. L. Lester -- born Benjamin, he renamed himself Booker -- was dedicated to its success. He worked through the Baptist Church and was active in the Bibb County and Shelby Springs Baptist Associations. He was lauded as one of several fine teachers who "are struggling to bring our people up, along this educational line." The Bibb County Association hailed him as "a hero in our Sunday School Work" (*Minutes* 1894). In addition, he edited the weekly *Time-Piece*.



B. L. "Booker" Lester,  
principal of Aldrich Grammar  
School and editor of  
*Alabama Time-Piece*

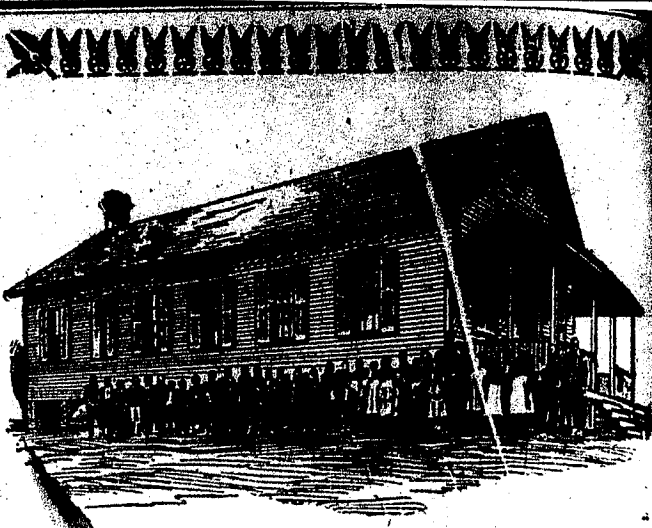
The unusually long school year, from mid-September to the end of May, underlines the strength of Lester's and the community's commitment to learning. State-funded "negro" schools, chronically and grievously underfunded, seldom went for more than three months, if that. Aldrich provided at least twice that. The exceptional nature of the education offered in Aldrich could not be clearer.

The building is probably the original Epsibeth Baptist, established in 1873, the first church in Aldrich. It exemplifies the desire of freed Blacks to create their own churches during the decades following the Civil War. Stories handed down in the Aldrich community confirm that on weekdays the church doubled as a school for children of color. Here as in so many ways the Black church provided opportunities for building

stronger, more resilient, more successful communities -- and education was a key part of that. Writes historian Wilson Fallin: "No issue concerned black Baptists more than education. Coming out of slavery, blacks craved formal education."

Submitted by Kathy King & Anita Stewart Sims

Contact us at [Moaltrail@gmail.com](mailto:Moaltrail@gmail.com). We want to hear your stories and welcome corrections of errors of fact or interpretation.



**ANNOUNCEMENT**  
OF THE  
**ALDRICH : GRAMMAR : SCHOOL,**  
Aldrich, Ala.  
School Opens Sept. 12, 1898; Closes May 28, 29 & 30, 1899.

**COURSE OF STUDY:**

I. PRIMARY DEPARTMENT.

FIRST GRADE—First Reader, Counting, Spelling, Making Letters and Figures.  
SECOND GRADE—Second Reader, Sanford's Intermediate Arithmetic, Swinton's Word Primer, Penmanship.  
THIRD GRADE—Third Reader, Sanford's Intermediate Arithmetic (beginning at Fractions), Swinton's Word Primer, Language Lessons, Monteith's Primary Geography, Penmanship, House I Live In.

II. GRAMMAR DEPARTMENT.

FOURTH GRADE—Fourth Reader, Sanford's Common School Arithmetic, Harvey's Elementary Grammar, Swinton's Word Book, Steel's Physiology and Hygiene, Monteith's Second Geography, Penmanship.  
FIFTH GRADE—Barnes' Primary History of the United States (finish), Sanford's Common School Arithmetic (beginning at Fractions), Monteith's Geography, Harvey's Elementary Grammar, Swinton's Word Book, Steel's Physiology, Penmanship.  
SIXTH GRADE—Barnes' Complete History of the United States, Monteith's Complete Geography, White's Complete Arithmetic, Harvey's Complete Grammar, National Speller, Steel's Complete Physiology and Hygiene.  
SEVENTH GRADE—Negro History, Bookkeeping (Rice's Practical), and complete all the studies in the sixth grade.

REMARKS.  
Tuition for boarding students is 75 cents per month.  
Thorough work and obedience to teachers are sustained by Board of Directors: E. D. Taylor, president, G. T. Jones, secretary.

**B. L. LESTER, Principal.**

Aldrich Grammar School, from *Alabama Time-Piece*, 1898