

**The Beginnings of Public Education in Rural Tennessee During the Reconstruction Period:  
A Look at the Schools at Ames Plantation in Fayette County, TN**

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**Introduction**

In December 1860, South Carolina seceded from the Union, and the United States of America would never be the same. Shortly after this event, the Civil War broke out and threatened to tear apart the nation. As the Union army slowly reclaimed the Confederate states, Reconstruction began. During this time, as one former slaveholder in West Tennessee observed, “all the traditions and habits of both races had been suddenly overthrown...and neither knew just what to do; or how to accommodate themselves to the new situation” (McKenzie 124-125). It was a period of experimentation, flux, and uncertainty (McKenzie 149). As it gradually occurred to the freedmen that they were indeed free, many moved away from plantations to the cities (Jordan 47), but the freedmen needed aid to adjust to freedom (Richardson 419). During

Reconstruction, great efforts were made to revive the previously failed efforts of establishing a public school system for both white and black children in the state of Tennessee.

According to W.E.B. Du Bois, before the Civil War, there was little belief in public education throughout the South because there was a widespread opinion that the poor did not need education (Du Bois 639). This idea was established by rich landowners who did not want to pay for the poor to be educated and was perpetuated by the fact that poor whites did not demand education, but saw it rather as a privilege of wealthy landowners (Du Bois 641). It was not easy to establish this public school system, for “tax for free schools [was] as unwelcome as a vapor bath in dog days” (Tourgee 126). However, through many trials and despite the fact that their efforts were “impeded by the same prejudices and restrictions which retarded other worthwhile projects” (Durham ii), the citizens of Tennessee were able to establish laws during this time which did establish free schools and which still greatly affect schools in Tennessee even today. In addition, the advances and struggles of forming a system of free schools reflect the social, political, and economic changes which were happening in all aspects of the state (Durham ii).

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the majority of the citizens of state of Tennessee lived in rural areas, just as they had before the Civil War; however, very few histories of public education in Tennessee focus on the rural schools. This paper aims to summarize and explain the rise and advancement of public schools in Tennessee throughout its history, focusing on the Reconstruction Period and the impact that the changes in education during this period had on education. It will look specifically at the experiences of individuals involved with the schools of Fayette County, Tennessee, particularly on the rural Ames Plantation, a land base encompassing 18,600 acres in Fayette and Hardeman Counties, TN (Whatley 3). It will first give a history of education in Tennessee, from the founding of Tennessee in 1796 to the end of Reconstruction

and the Democrats' regaining of power in the 1870s. It will then look at the rise of schools in rural Tennessee, specifically those of the Ames Plantation. This paper demonstrates the difficulties of establishing and maintaining a public school system that have existed in Tennessee from its very beginnings until today.

Because there are few histories of rural education in Tennessee, this paper draws on a variety of sources to gain a complete picture of its subject. Information is drawn from books, both primary and secondary sources, focusing on Tennessee, Reconstruction, and/or Education. This paper also uses articles from periodicals as well as master's theses. Some of these sources, such as that of R. L. M'Donnold, Gertrude Durham, W.E.B. Du Bois, etc., are more than fifty years old, and must be treated as such. M'Donnold's article about Reconstruction in Tennessee was published in 1896. This makes it a valuable source in conveying information as well as the attitude of many people at that time, but many of the views in the article are contrary to our understandings today and must be taken as such. Much of the specific information about life at the rural schools is taken from interviews of students and teachers at the schools of Ames, given both by myself and an employee at Ames. Fayette County School Records are used to gain a picture of class size and building quality. Finally, this paper uses maps of the area that document where the schools are located.

### **Pre-Civil War Tennessee**

Before the Civil War, Tennessee tried and failed many times to establish a public school system. When Tennessee became a state in 1796, there had been some limited efforts at private education. Four private schools for higher education were operating in the state at that time (Durham 1). There were not, however, any schools for the training of prospective teachers for schools (Stubblefield 36). The constitution written in 1796 for this new state made no mention of

education or any public education system (Fleming 1). Ten years later, the United States Congress's Cession Act of 1806 officially began public schools in Tennessee (Fleming 1). This act was an agreement between the Federal government, Tennessee, and North Carolina concerning the use of land in Tennessee (Durham 1). The state of Tennessee was to use one hundred thousand acres of land for the purpose of two colleges, as well as an additional one hundred thousand acres of land to establish an academy in each of the state's counties. At the time, there were 27 counties in the state, and by the end of 1806, the Tennessee General Assembly had established an academy in each of these (Fleming 1). This act, however, did not effectively establish a public school system throughout Tennessee (Durham 1). Though Tennessee's General Assembly tried several more times to establish a public education system in the early 1800s, inadequate funds and lack of enforcement of these laws made it difficult for public schools to be established (Fleming 1). For example, an Act in 1817, which separated common school and academy lands, opened the door for a public school system. However, only four public school systems were established as a result of the act, and very few actual schools were opened, making this law another disappointment to the beginnings of the public school system (Durham 3).

When settlers began to move to Fayette County in Western Tennessee in the 1820s, parents were personally responsible for the education of their children. Some wealthy families hired tutors to conduct school in their homes or in a small nearby schoolhouse (*Fayette County* 50). A woman named Mrs. Walker is reported by the *Goodspeed Histories of Tennessee* to have been the first teacher in Fayette County. She taught in "the old log courthouse" beginning in 1826. Another major step towards public education in Fayette County was the opening of the male academy in Somerville, Fayette County, in 1831. This academy operated until 1854. Land

for a female academy in Fayette County was bought in 1831, and a building was erected 1833. This operated until 1853 when a separate building opened for the Somerville Female Institute (*The Goodspeed Histories* 810).

Tennessee's new constitution, adopted in 1835, urged the General Assembly to focus on education. Soon after, the General Assembly centralized the administration of state schools and called for the election of a state superintendent. Robert H. McEwen was elected as the first state superintendent of public instruction in Tennessee in February 1836. Despite the changes made by the Assembly and the recommendations made by the superintendent, in many places, particularly in rural Tennessee, private education was still greatly preferred to public (Fleming 1).

In 1853, Governor Andrew Johnson gave a message to the General Assembly expressing his concern for the public education system in Tennessee. The governor cited both an inadequacy of the constitution and inadequacy of funds as the reasons for the failing system (Fleming 1). In 1854, Tennessee legislation was passed for levying a property tax and a poll tax for the support of common schools in Tennessee (Durham 8). The money was to be distributed based on "scholastic population" (Durham 9). A public school system was established in Nashville in 1852 and in Memphis in 1858. There was little support, however, for school systems outside these major cities. The majority of the state was rural and had a scattered population with many slaves. The children of wealthy planters were taught by private tutors or sent to private boarding academies, making public schools unnecessary and unwanted by rich aristocrats who held power in these regions (Durham 10). In fact, many wealthy landowners did not want poor whites to be educated (Durham 11). In addition, because the school fund was inadequate and there was not enough support from agencies to protect what little fund did exist, establishing a public education system largely failed in the more rural areas of Tennessee, such as Fayette County

(Durham 10). Though Tennessee was the only state in which it was legal to educate slaves and some planters did teach slaves to read and write, there is little evidence that the practice was widespread, and the black population remained largely illiterate before the war (Foner 96).

Thus, before the Civil War began, Tennessee had successfully established the base for a public school system, accumulated a school fund, and set up a system of taxation for the support of schools (Durham 11). However, just as rural places such as Fayette County were beginning to make much positive progress concerning public schools, the Civil War intervened (*Fayette County* 51).

### **The Civil War**

The Civil War put all educational efforts in Tennessee on hold. Tennessee did not secede from the Union until after the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861 and President Lincoln's request that each of the states loyal to the Union provide troops for the Union cause. Tennessee was displeased with this demand, and though it still had many loyal to the Union, seceded from the Union on June 8, 1861 (M'Donnold 308). During the war, Tennessee became a battlefield. In fact, Tennessee provided a larger proportion of troops – both for the Confederacy and the Union – than any other state (M'Donnold 309). The state was therefore unable to keep a strong commitment to public education during this time. Almost all schools except for those in Memphis were closed for the entirety of the war (Durham 33). Much of the school fund that had been accumulated before the war was used for the Confederate cause (Durham 28).

### **Reconstruction in Tennessee**

In 1862, Tennessee became the first Confederate state to begin to fall to the Union army, and Reconstruction began (M'Donnold 308). When they arrived in the state, the Union army was met by a swarm of escaping slaves who sought refuge in the Union camps. At these

“contraband” camps, some non-profit organizations, particularly Northern missionary societies, began to send teachers to provide education for the blacks who lived there (Phillips 146).

In early 1862, General Ulysses S. Grant ordered the establishment of a contraband camp at Grand Junction, TN, under the supervision of Chaplain John Eaton (Phillips 146). In June 1862, Memphis fell back under Union control in the Battle of Memphis (Eaton 192). On November 3, 1862, after the capture of Nashville, President Lincoln appointed Andrew Johnson as military governor of Tennessee and instructed Johnson to reestablish a republican form of government there (M’Donnold 310). On November 12, 1862, largely due to the vast number of former slaves who were staying at the contraband camps, General Grant and Chaplain John Eaton launched the most extensive effort made in any state during the war to assist former slaves in the Mississippi Valley area. In this effort, black men and women would help around the Union camp as well as receive a basic education (Armstrong 226). Eaton was put in charge of all freedmen affairs and the contraband camps in the Department of Tennessee; he held this office until the Freedmen’s Bureau took up the effort in 1865 (Armstrong 227). In December 1862, the contraband camp moved to just below the city of Memphis, where it remained until the end of the war (Phillips 147).

Though the efforts to assist those recently freed from slavery were first directed toward employment and protection, Chaplain Eaton stated that these efforts preceded education “in order only,-not in importance” (Eaton 193). Chaplain Eaton, like many other Union army chaplains, believed that education was absolutely essential for blacks to make the transition from slave to responsible citizen (Armstrong 223). Eaton welcomed the help of other army chaplains, as well as support from benevolent societies, including the American Missionary Association (Eaton 193). The American Missionary Association, which was established in 1846, provided

many services, particularly education, to help those “struggling upward from slavery” (Richardson 419).

The contraband camps supported grammar schools for reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography. These schools used the *Freedmen’s Primer or First Reader* and taught not only reading, but also Christian morality, particularly forgiveness. Industrial schools to teach sewing to freedmen also opened on these camps (Phillips 147). There were both day and night schools at the Union camps for students of all ages (Phillips 148). Many obstacles, including a great lack of adequate places to hold school, and a lack of good desks, seats, textbooks, etc. to use in the schools, threatened to undermine these educational efforts (Phillips 148). Despite these hardships, freedmen had an intense desire to learn and were reported to learn just as rapidly as white students and with greater zeal (Phillips 149).

On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in the Confederacy. However, the state of Tennessee was omitted from this mandate at the request of Andrew Johnson, who convinced President Lincoln that the best way to restore Tennessee to the Union was not to force the Emancipation Proclamation on them, for the Union had already reclaimed the state, and many Union supporters lived there. According to R. L. M’Donnold writing in 1896, the omission was not so that Tennessee could continue to permit slavery, but rather to allow Tennesseans to abolish slavery on their own (309). A convention was scheduled for December 19, 1864, at which Tennessee was to reestablish a republican government so that it might be considered for readmission into the Union. This convention was postponed until January 9, 1865, because of the presence of a Confederate army in the city of Nashville. When the convention took place, it proposed amendments to the state’s constitution which would abolish slavery, prevent any future legislation from “recognizing the right of

property in man,” and repeal secession and all governmental acts, except court decisions, since May 6, 1861, null and void (M’Donnold 311). All who voted on these amendments were required to take the “iron-clad oath” stating that they supported the Union and rejoiced in the downfall of the Confederacy. The amendments were ratified and adopted on February 28, 1865 (M’Donnold 311). Tennessee was thus the only former Confederate state to abolish slavery as a completely voluntary amendment to the state constitution (M’Donnold 313).

Once all slaves had gained their freedom, they first looked to land as a means of advancing their social status. The belief among freedmen seemed to be that “the very foundations of the social, intellectual, and material advancement of a race depends upon their becoming possessors of the soil” (McKenzie 125). Though this sentiment did not disappear, opinion among blacks began to shift to focus on education as the “anti-slavery,” for it would make it unsafe for masters to re-enslave them (Phillips 147). According to Rev. Dr. William Herbert Brewster, who was born to black sharecroppers on the Ames Plantation in the late 1890s, “after slavery, some Black people were given so many acres and a mule. That didn’t last long because they did not have education enough to keep up with their accounts and to do anything about agriculture more than they had learned as slave dwellers” (Reagon 186).

A letter from a northern missionary who was working with freedmen in the South in 1866 stated that just after emancipation, most freedmen, whether age 7 or age 70, began to attend school whenever possible (Richardson 419). Blacks seemed to want to rise out of their position of inferiority through education (Du Bois 638); they saw education as power in society (Du Bois 641). It was the essential key to freedom (Phillips 146). A group of “colored friends” published an open letter in the *Nashville Daily Press and Times* saying, “Abraham Lincoln made our

bodies free, and we hope that good schools will make our minds free and enlightened” (Phillips 158). Freedmen had a “seemingly unquenchable thirst for education” (Foner 96).

Some whites saw this intense desire of the freedmen to be educated and encouraged it. General Clinton B. Fisk, assistant commissioner of the Bureau in Tennessee and Kentucky, stated, “The colored people will be educated – they imperatively demand it” (Phillips 149). Many felt an obligation to educate freedmen, for “nothing in the institution of slavery prepared man for the responsibilities of freedom.” Education allowed those recently freed from slavery to become men (Armstrong 224). General Oliver O. Howard, the first head of the Freedmen’s Bureau, stated that the education of freedmen’s children was “the true relief,” which all freedmen needed from “beggary and dependence” (Howard 60). Although both blacks and enthusiastic whites probably put too much emphasis on education as a solution to the freedmen’s problems, there is no doubt that education was extremely important (Morris 211).

Though some whites did openly support the education of blacks in the South, many whites strongly opposed the education of freedmen. Some saw it as ridiculous to say that blacks should be educated. Upon seeing a school for blacks, a member of the Louisiana legislature said, “I have seen many an absurdity in my lifetime, but this is the climax!” (Du Bois 637). Other southern whites saw the education of freed blacks as simply unnecessary. Blacks were seen by many white planters as merely workers to make cotton, and, as a planter in the Mississippi Valley observed, “They don’t need education to help them make cotton” (Cobb 180). William Herbert Brewster observed that all the Board of Education in his community “wanted you to know was how to wash and iron and work in the fields, cut logs and do the things that were the chores of slaves,” not get an education (Reagon 188). Some even believed that “schooling...ruins a nigger” (Du Bois 645); though opinion was generally mixed as to whether

schooling would improve or diminish the quality of black labor (Phillips 163). A few whites argued that education was a disservice to blacks because it showed freedmen what opportunities were present in the world and gave them a false sense of hope that they could get there. This awareness of doors which were not in fact open to blacks could only end in “pain and confusion and bitterness.” Schools should therefore reflect the freedman’s place in the world, particularly in the South (Cobb 180). According to M’Donnold, who was writing in 1896, laws and principles which gave equal rights to blacks “gave the negroes an exaggerated idea of their own privileges,” and this only resulted in bitterness between the two races (M’Donnold 317). Many, even employees of the Freedmen’s Bureau, tried to encourage blacks to get an education and then return to work for their former masters, sometimes romanticizing the ex-slave/ex-master relationship (Phillips 163). This was furthered by the curriculum of forgiveness used in many of the Freedmen’s schools (Phillips 147). Though many factors may have influenced the opposition by a large group of whites to freedmen’s education, many scholars believe that it was influenced by a fear that whites had of educated blacks (Phillips 163). Francis L. Cardozo observed in 1868 that white aristocrats “will take precious good care that the black people shall never be enlightened” because “their power is built on and sustained by ignorance” (“Francis L. Cardozo” 481).

Despite this opposition and many barriers to the funding of freedmen’s schools there was, as Booker T. Washington observed, “An intense desire which the people of my race showed for education,” and no force could stop this desire (Du Bois 641).

Before the Freedmen’s Bureau was established in 1865, the government did very little to help freedmen gain an education. Effort was made throughout the South by churches, missionary societies, philanthropic groups, and army chaplains (Armstrong 225). In addition, blacks took the

initiative, especially in rural areas, to set up schools in churches, basements, homes, etc. until the Freedmen's Bureau arrived (Foner 97). Indeed, the first black school in Memphis was begun by Lucinda Humphrey, a black nurse who would hold classes for fellow hospital employees after hours (Durham 34). There were also other non-traditional forms of education, such as children teaching parents, workers learning on breaks, etc. (Foner 97). Blacks would raise money, charge tuition, or even tax themselves to raise the funds for these schools (Foner 98). There were almost 2,000 black people attending school in Memphis by the time the Freedmen's Bureau arrived. By spring 1865, more than 4,000 black children were in school in Memphis through a combined effort of General Eaton and the Union army, philanthropic organizations, and educated blacks (Durham 34). Despite major sacrifices which blacks made to support education, poverty hindered many of these efforts, and they had to turn to the Freedmen's Bureau and northern benevolent societies for help (Foner 98). With this financial assistance came control over the schools, including the replacement of many of the black teachers with northern whites (Foner 99).

Though many schools for blacks were being established and many white schools were still in use and doing well in the city of Memphis by the mid-1860s, schools outside of Memphis for both blacks and whites were still doing very poorly. Those that had been open before the war had been closed for four years, and in many rural areas, there was an extremely small amount of schools opened even before the war, setting an inadequate base for the development of public schools after the war (Durham 34). Illiteracy rates were extremely high throughout the state at this time for both blacks and whites (Durham 35). Though some had the opinion that blacks were well suited to be educated because "they were well disciplined and could and would carry out orders to the letter," very few blacks in Fayette County, Tennessee, were being educated

immediately following the war. Those that were being educated were only being taught on an individual basis by sympathizers through listening and observation (“Education for Blacks”).

General Fisk, an education enthusiast, encouraged planters to establish plantation schools for their workers, but these were never widespread for a number of reasons. First, many freedmen had moved from plantations to cities during and soon after the war, some even for the purpose of getting an education for their kids (Phillips 149). In addition, some argued that farmers were left poor after the war because of the confiscation of their property and therefore they could not afford to pay for schools on their plantations (Phillips 150). Some freedmen demanded plantation schools, however, making them a part of their labor contract for work on the plantation (Foner 96).

Though some efforts were being made by a variety of people and organizations to establish a public school system in Tennessee, the Freedmen’s Bureau (or Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands), which was established in 1865 by the federal government, provided a much needed centralized organizational structure for the advancement of Freedmen’s education. Many schools were opened with the assistance of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Tennessee, especially in the cities of Memphis and Nashville (Phillips 151). The Freedmen’s Bureau, benevolent societies, and even the freedmen themselves all played an important role in supporting the day to day operations of the schools (Phillips 150), and the Freedmen’s Bureau provided the salaries for most of the teachers (Swint 52). In addition, a superintendent of schools for freedmen was chosen for each southern state to work for the Freedmen’s Bureau alongside the missionaries who were already there. Reverend John Watson Alvord was chosen to supervise the education of freedmen in Tennessee (Swint 52).

Despite their support from the federal government, these schools could not escape many of the same problems which other schools had faced. Though they received some funds from Congress as well as supportive Northerners, a lack of adequate funds still proved a barrier to establishing and operating a vast number of quality schools in the state (Phillips 151). In addition, many whites continued to oppose education for blacks and would threaten both teachers and students (Phillips 156). Finally, there was a lack of competent teachers who were available and willing to teach in the freedmen's schools (Phillips 152). Freedmen and those who supported freedmen's education greatly wanted good teachers so that they might be adequately instructed and prove that they could learn as well as whites (Phillips 153).

Preparing teachers for instructing freedmen was not an easy task. It happened first in New England with the help of abolitionists (Du Bois 637). Northern missionaries labored "obediently and cheerfully, waiting for a revelation of the result in our Father's own good time" (Richardson 424). Due to budget constraints and threats to teachers from the North, these teachers were eventually replaced by white southerners who wanted to teach but could not obtain positions in the white schools. Not all who failed to gain positions in white schools were willing to teach black children, so the selection of teachers for black schools was slim (Rabinowitz 566). Eventually, these white southern teachers would be replaced by black teachers.

All teachers, no matter their background, often struggled due to low salaries. In addition, often teachers of freedmen had very little education themselves, especially in rural areas (Cobb 116). A letter from J.H. Barnum, Assistant Superintendent of Education for the Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee, concerning the progress of the Freedmen's Bureau in March 1869 stated that the most urgent thing that the schools needed was competent teachers (Swint 76).

In 1865, Governor Brownlow, a Radical, or extreme Republican, was elected as governor of Tennessee (M'Donnold 312). With the election of Brownlow, more focus was given to the politics of the Radicals than to the issue of schooling. His first legislation focused somewhat on education, but only vaguely (Durham 35).

In April 1865, a bill was proposed in the Tennessee House and approved in the Senate that there should be a Committee on Education and Common Schools which would formulate a system of free schools, ascertain what tax would be necessary to inaugurate the proposed system, and suggest how such a tax should be raised. Senator Bossom was appointed as head of this Committee on Education, and the committee worked all summer of 1865 consulting educational programs throughout the United States as well as investigating the potential different strategies had for success in Tennessee (Durham 35-36).

Leading educators from throughout the state met in July 1865 and founded the State Teachers' Association, which advocated free schools, the elevation of the teaching profession, and the establishment of normal schools throughout Tennessee (Durham 40).

The Committee on Education proposed a bill in the fall of 1865, which "adopted no new and untried paths, no new theory," but rather adapted public education programs, which had worked in states throughout the United States. It suggested that Tennessee appoint a superintendent of education for the state as well as superintendents for each county. It also suggested a six month school term and the adoption of a tax system in each sub-district to support this (Durham 36). It called for equal but separate education for children of color (Durham 37).

The bill was greatly criticized throughout early 1866 for its encouragement of education for freedmen. The Committee attempted to gain back support by adding an amendment, which

would tax only people of color for the support of black schools (Durham 37). The bill received other criticism for imposing heavy taxes on a population recovering from a war. Some even went so far as to call the school bill unconstitutional (Durham 37-38).

Despite opposition, the school bill passed in the Senate on February 13, 1866, upon its third reading, and was sent to the House (Durham 38). The bill met difficulties here and was postponed until the next session on November 12, 1866 (Durham 38). Many were very upset about this delay and lamented the many children who would be denied an education because of the postponement (Durham 38-39). Governor Brownlow stated in January 1867, "Men of enterprise and capital will not settle where they cannot educate their children." Therefore, he argued, the delay in passing the school bill will decrease immigration and capital (Durham 41). Though these protests had validity, it is also true that Congress knew it in fact did not have enough funds or a solid enough tax system (Durham 39).

A committee in the House examined the school bill from December 1866 to February 1867. It reported on it favorably; however, it suggested a few amendments: a five month term instead of six; county trustee rather than the county superintendent administer school matters; and a decrease in the state property tax for support of public schools from three mills on the dollar to two mills on the dollar (Durham 41). The House accepted these amendments and passed the School Bill of February 28, 1867 (Durham 41). On March 5, the Senate approved the bill with its amendments, and finally the "Act to Provide for the Reorganization, Supervision, and Maintenance of Free Common Schools" or the Public School Act of 1867 was passed (Durham 42).

This law restored an office of the state superintendent, which had not been present in Tennessee since 1844. The state superintendent would be elected by the people for two year

terms, during which he would coordinate and supervise all phases of education (Durham 42). The state of Tennessee elected General John Eaton as its first State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Tennessee shortly after the law was passed (Stubblefield 31). The law also established subordinate offices in all counties and set up a system of reports to keep the offices accountable for their progress towards opening public schools (Durham 42). A free school was required in each sub-district to operate for at least five months per year for both whites and blacks of legal age, though whites and blacks were required to be taught in separate schools (Durham 45). Under this new law in TN, schools must be “as free as the air we breathe” to receive state appropriations (Durham 47). The schools would be supported through poll and property taxes (Durham 44). Because the Public School Law established common schools supported through a tax, schools moved toward being state supported, rather than charity supported (Phillips 156). Also, because the law provided for state supported black schools, much of the Freedmen’s Bureau’s educational activities were taken over by the state (Jordan 56). The new law allowed Tennessee to begin rebuilding the public school system which had been destroyed by the war (Durham 47).

This bill was passed around the same time that leaders were beginning to argue that blacks should be taught to teach other blacks competently. According to General Howard, white Southern teachers were not suitable to teach the freedmen because they had too little faith in black education and too little knowledge of practical teaching (Howard 60). He eventually concluded that he must teach blacks to teach in the freedmen’s schools. As a friend told him, “you cannot keep up the lower grades unless you have the higher” (Howard 61). In addition, the black community began to insist that blacks who were graduates of local colleges and normal schools teach them (Rabinowitz 566). Fisk University was therefore established in 1866 as the

first normal, or teacher training, school for freedmen in Tennessee (Phillips 155). By 1868, blacks were being taught by 54 white teachers and 41 black teachers throughout the state of Tennessee (Jordan 57).

Many of these blacks who became teachers had been freed before the war. The schools therefore brought these people into the newly freed community, and they often became leaders in this community. Teachers were seen as courageous for continuing to teach in spite of political opposition. They were also regarded with respect for their place of authority in the community and well liked for their willingness to interact with their students and students' families outside of the school, something the white teachers had never been willing to do. Schools therefore served as a way to bring together members of the black community, those newly freed and the previously freed, the Northerner and the Southerner (Foner 100).

Also, during this time, Tennessee was working towards being readmitted into the Union. After ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in April 1865, Tennessee asked for readmission to the Union and full restoration of her citizen's rights. However, this was just after Lincoln had been shot, so the United States Congress delayed its decision for more than a year. In May 1866, a bill to readmit Tennessee was proposed. It would allow readmission so long as Tennessee enfranchised every class of citizen by January 1, 1867, and ratified the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Tennessee ratified the Fourteenth Amendment on June 19, 1866 (M'Donnold 312), and on July 23, 1866, Congress passed a joint resolution restoring Tennessee to the Union (M'Donnold 313). Tennessee was thus the only state to "voluntarily renew her allegiance to the United States before the war closed" (M'Donnold 314).

Despite her passing a school bill, being readmitted into the Union, and establishing a normal school for freedmen, Tennessee was still a broken state throughout the Reconstruction

era. According to a Northerner who worked as a principal at a school in Nashville beginning in September 1866, “the state and city were then just beginning to recover from the disasters of a great civil war. All educational affairs were in a state of demoralization” (Snow 279). Because of this, Tennesseans were forced to continue to turn to the North for help in their schools. In fact, all principals and teachers at that time were chosen without “sectional prejudice” because the school board was desperately trying to make schools better in any way possible. The Northerners did, however, feel like foreigners in Tennessee (Snow 279).

According to M’Donnold, who was writing in 1896, once Tennessee was readmitted to the Union, it suffered many “evils” “at the hands of a controlling party of her own citizens.” At this time the Radicals led by Governor Brownlow were in control. These Radicals made sure that ex-Confederates had no say in the new government (314). As of an Act of July 16, 1866, the Freedmen’s Bureau could sell or lease any property owned by the Confederate government and use the money to finance schools (Swint 51).

Though the school law in 1867 laid the foundation for rebuilding the public school system in Tennessee, many districts and even some counties failed to comply with the stipulations of the law because either the counties did not have the money to support it or people in the county opposed the idea of free schools, particularly for black children (Stubblefield 72). Before any of the funds raised through this law could be distributed, there needed to be a school population census taken; however, many obstacles, such as threats on the lives of the census takers, delayed the census for more than a year (Phillips 157). When the census was taken, though funds were distributed based on the number of educable children in a county, there was little regulation concerning what percentage was required to go to white schools verses black schools. This increased the gap in opportunities available for the education of freedmen (Cobb

143-144). In addition, many teachers were also threatened by the Ku Klux Klan, especially between June 1867 and May 1868. Some teachers endured, but some stopped teaching and moved away due to these threats (Jordan 57). Many school buildings were burnt down by angry whites protesting black education; thirty-seven school buildings were burned in July 1869 alone (Stubblefield 33).

On March 14, 1868, a revised public school law was passed which would provide a more effective means of getting funds for educational purposes. This law made a small amount of progress in obtaining funds in its first two years (Stubblefield 34). At this point, schools in Tennessee should have been able to rely less on Northern benevolent societies and more on the state government for funds (Foner 97). However, public schools existed only on paper at this time except for in Memphis and Nashville, so Superintendent Burt had to ask Northern benevolent societies and the Freedmen's Bureau to continue their support of the schools in order to attempt to establish schools in rural areas. The Bureau did begin to give more control in the schools over to the state while still providing some funds (Phillips 157).

The first free state supported schools for black students were opened in Memphis in January 1869. All teachers there were well qualified and full of "zeal and earnestness," and there were over 1500 people enrolled (Swint 68). By January 1869, most black schools were under state control, though some were still controlled by freedmen, the Freedmen's Bureau, or benevolent societies. There were over 100,000 pupils in 338 schools throughout Tennessee (Jordan 57). When J.H. Barnum, Assistant Superintendent of Education for the Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee, visited Fayette County, TN, in January 1869, nothing had been done there concerning public education despite the state laws. There had been three different men appointed as County Superintendent, but none of them had done anything concerning the new law, and to

Barnum's knowledge, there was not a free school in the county (Swint 69). While he was there, Barnum set up a free school for blacks near Gallaway Switch in Fayette County, and hoped that when the next superintendent obtained power that he would appoint and pay a teacher. This was the only free school in the county as far as he knew (Swint 69).

By May 1869, supervision of black education was almost exclusively under the state (Jordan 57), and in December 1869, responsibility for public schools was placed on the individual counties (Phillips 157). Obstacles to children attending school, however, did not disappear. Lack of funds and adequate teachers kept many schools from opening and operating well. In addition, distance, foul weather, cold schoolhouses, sickness, and farm demands kept children from attending schools that were in existence (Phillips 160). The biggest obstacle that schools had to overcome was white hostility toward both the white and black teachers and the black students (Phillips 160).

### **The End of Reconstruction in Tennessee**

In late 1869, Governor Brownlow announced that he would be leaving his governorship and going to the Senate (M'Donnold 325). Governor Senter replaced Brownlow, and when it came time for reelections, Governor Senter allowed former Confederate supporters, most of whom were conservative Democrats, the right to vote so that he might be reelected. This election allowed Democrats to regain their control of the Tennessee state government in the legislation and governorship. The new legislation began immediately reversing much of what the Republican government under Brownlow had done. Many of the Democrats and ex-Confederates saw it as "remedying as far as they dared the evils of Brownlow's administration." This reestablishment of a Democratic government and repeal of many Republican laws marked the end of the Reconstruction era in Tennessee (M'Donnold 326).

The changes that the new State government inflicted upon Tennessee would be a major set-back for the public education system (Stubblefield 35). In 1869, Tennessee Democrats drafted a new constitution. The new legislation repealed the state education law and made schooling a voluntary decision of each county. This essentially destroyed the public schools for blacks in all areas except Memphis and Nashville (Foner 422). Because the counties could decide for themselves on the matter of public education, most counties took no initiative to set up a school system and a taxation system to support it (Stubblefield 35). "Schooling was a major casualty of Democratic rule" throughout the South, and Tennessee was no exception (Foner 422).

This new constitution also required racial segregation in public schools. The superintendent of public instruction elected that same year even believed that it was "not necessary to educate the farmer, mechanic, or laborer" (Foner 422).

In the summer of 1870, the Freedmen's Bureau stopped its educational work, so the counties had no system pushing them toward or assisting them in opening schools. Many freedmen stepped in to help with money, buildings, etc., but they could not support schools on their own (Phillips 152). In addition, by 1870, missionary societies had shifted their focus from establishing primary schools to improving advanced schools so that blacks could learn to teach and would not have to rely on substandard white instruction (Rabinowitz 569).

By 1871, only about a fourth of the counties in Tennessee had made any efforts toward public education (Stubblefield 37). Thus, the Democratic government of Tennessee "had begun to undermine the legal and political gains blacks had achieved" during early Reconstruction (Foner 423).

In March 1873, a law was passed which legislators hoped would renew the school system (Stubblefield 38-39). The office of state superintendent of education was reinstated. The superintendent would be nominated by the governor and confirmed by the Senate rather than elected by the people. The salary of both the state and county superintendents would be increased. The school property tax was lowered from what it was under the Law of 1867, but authority was given in districts to levy a small additional tax. This law saw very few immediate results (Stubblefield 39). It did, however, truly begin the public school system in some rural counties such as Fayette County due to its provision for an elected county superintendent of public instruction in each county in the state as well as school directors in each civil district. According to Dorothy Morton, a Fayette County historian, the first superintendent of schools in Fayette County under this law was William Maris. He was appointed in April 1873 (*Fayette County* 51).

In September 1873, Superintendent Maris gathered with all of the school directors in Fayette County and formed the Fayette County School Director's Association. As the law required, the school system in Fayette County was organized as a dual system with blacks and whites in separate schools (*Fayette County* 51). This dual system was seen as necessary. Many believed that "the interests and happiness of the two races would be best promoted by the establishment of separate schools" (Rabinowitz 573). Francis Cardozo, speaking in 1868, claimed that in most places, "colored people would prefer separate schools, particularly until some of the present prejudice against their race is removed" ("Francis L. Cardozo" 480). Ironically, this belief was furthered by the fact that many blacks had pushed for black teachers to teach at blacks schools. Because the freedmen had pushed for black teachers rather than

integration, many whites became convinced that blacks were happy with and even desired segregated schools (Rabinowitz 594). This idea would persist until the mid 1900s.

Though Tennessee did not see tremendous progress in public schools under the law in 1873, this law certainly had an impact on creating free schools throughout the state. By 1880, 84 of the 94 counties were levying a tax to support educational efforts. In many counties, however, there was little public support for a school system and there were not enough funds or teachers to support a school system (Stubblefield 43).

Because of the lack of funds in Tennessee, the state was able to give very little money to public education. Schools were supported mostly by the people in the community (“Education for Blacks”). The schools in Fayette County were organized in their present system in 1874 under the superintendent R.W. Pitman (who served until 1877) (*The Goodspeed Histories* 811). At this time, there were 63 public schools Fayette County. More than half of these were for black children. During the 1870s, most schools in rural Tennessee met in one room school houses for between two and ten months of the year. Transportation needed to be improved before consolidation of schools was possible, so most of these schools had less than fifty students. Each of the major towns in Fayette County had a public white high school. Most rural areas offered only primary education to blacks (*150 Years in Fayette County, TN* 261). Many of the academies during this time in Fayette County charged tuition of \$2-\$4 per month, but these were eventually supplemented by tax money, and tuition became free to all students in the district (*Fayette County* 51).

In 1881, Mrs. Nora Cannon was elected as superintendent of Fayette County schools. She was the first woman to hold office by election in Tennessee. She served until her death in 1888 (*Fayette County* 51). Much progress was made during her term as superintendent. For example,

in 1883, Fayette County had a white scholastic population of 2,249. At the time, seven hundred fifty (33.35%) were enrolled in 29 white schools (about 26 per school), and the number of attendance days was 57. By 1886, the white scholastic population was 2,981; 1,156 (38.8%) attended 55 schools (about 21 per school) for 66 attendance days. In 1883, there was a black scholastic population of 5,574; 1,952 (35.1%) of these attended 37 schools (about 53 per school). By 1886, the black scholastic population was 7,376, and 3,821 (51.8%) attended 79 schools (about 48 per school) (*The Goodspeed Histories* 811).

In the early 1890s, Superintendent Professor T.T. Hardy proposed a uniform set of rules and curriculum for schools in Tennessee. He proposed raising the county tax for schools with limited success (*Fayette County* 52).

By 1890, four important decisions concerning education in Tennessee had been made: there would be state supported public schools, both blacks and whites would be educated, blacks and whites would be educated separately, and blacks would teach other blacks (Rabinowitz 565).

After the turn of the century, schools in Tennessee continued to make progress. By 1907, there were 68 black schools and 74 teachers in Fayette County (*150 Years in Fayette County, TN* 261). In 1909, Fayette County High School opened as the result of a legislative act authorizing the erection of “at least one four-year high school in each county in the state” (Morton, “Education”). The first high school for blacks in Fayette County opened in Somerville in 1912. It was a two year high school until 1928, when it became four year school (*150 Years in Fayette County, TN* 261).

### **Schools at Ames**

The Ames Plantation is an 18,600 acre land base in Fayette and Hardeman Counties near Grand Junction, TN, which was comprised of a number of ante-bellum plantations that Mr.

Hobart Ames of Massachusetts bought between 1901 and 1937. Mr. Ames used the land primarily for quail hunting and raising show cattle rather than commercial farming, though many of the residents there were tenant farmers working for Mr. Ames. The majority of the population on the Ames land base at this time was black (Whatley 14).

This section draws largely from interviews of people who lived and went to school in the area. These interviews included two recorded interviews, the first conducted in 1997 with Ms. Hazel Givens, who taught at the all-white Ames School in the 1934-1935 school year. The second was in 1998 with Ms. Gracie Black, who attended the Ames School in the 1920s. I conducted four interviews, all in 2009. The first was with Ms. Mary Hunt, who attended school at the all-black Jones Chapel School in the 1940s. The second was with Ms. Joy Rosser, who is a local historian of Fayette County and a former teacher at a rural school in the area. The third was with Mr. Ruble Anderson, his sister Ms. Mary Anderson Garny, and their friend Ms. Louise Finger Slingerland, all of whom attended the Ames School in the 1930s. The final interview was with Ms. Helen Black, who worked on the Ames Plantation for many years. These interviews provide much valuable and interesting information on the life at the schools on Ames Plantation in the early 1900s.

Information about these schools was also drawn from school grade books from the various schools. Due to a fire at the county courthouse in the early 1920s, many of the records from the beginnings of the schools at Ames have been lost. However, the newer records from the 1920s onward provide a picture of rural schools and sometimes information about the earlier times at these schools.

Finally, this section uses two articles and a few letters which recount aspects of the Ames community from the people who lived there. One records the life of Rev. Dr. William Herbert

Brewster, who was born to black sharecroppers at Ames in the late 1890s. The second is an article from *The Commercial Appeal* which speaks of the remodeling of the Ames school house and an interview with Ms. Hazel Givens, who taught at Ames. Some notes concerning the school from Mr. Raymond Anderson, who attended school at Ames, and Ms. Helen Black, who worked at Ames, are also used.

At the Ames Plantation in the early 1900s, there were four schools: one all white school and three all black schools. The first school at Ames was the all black school New Zion School, which opened sometime between 1870 and 1900. The all black Jones Chapel School opened between 1904 and 1921. The all white Ames School opened between 1915 and 1920 according to various reports. The third all black school, Jopic School, was operating by 1935, but the date of its opening is unknown (Fayette County School Records).

This lack of a large number of well operated public schools was typical of much of rural Tennessee. Though the majority of the population lived in rural areas, because these populations were so scattered, many did not have schools until well after schools were established in the more centralized cities. Before public schools opened at Ames, it is likely that the children who could afford it were educated privately in their homes by tutors or family members, and that those who could not afford it simply did not receive an education (Black, Helen). Raymond Anderson, a student at Ames in the 1930s, argues that there was not a school before at Ames before the Ames School because there was no need for one. He states that there were very few children on the plantation before the 1920s, and that the few who were there could have gone to school at Grand Junction, a town near Ames (Anderson, Raymond). It is unlikely that many students went to school in Grand Junction, however, because of the poor roads and lack of transportation (Morton, "Education"). Rev. Dr. Brewster recounts using a Blueback Speller to

teach himself lessons outside of school, for schools were only “scattered about here and yonder” (Reagon 187-188).

According to Ms. Joy Rosser, a local historian, once public schools began to be open in rural areas, there had to be a school about every few miles because children and teachers found it difficult to walk more than two miles to schools each morning (Rosser). This statement is supported by records at Fayette County Schools which indicate that very few of the students who attended any of the schools at Ames walked more than two miles to school (Fayette County Schools Records). In addition, topography maps from the 1940s show that the schools at Ames were between four and six miles from each other. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that the county was able to provide a great deal of transportation to and from schools. Once they were able to do so, schools were consolidated and many rural schools were shut down (Morton, “Education”).

Through the memories of those who attended and taught schools at Ames, it is clear that rural schools in Tennessee faced many obstacles which were not present even in the small cities. Because most of those who lived at Ames and other rural areas were farmers, the school year had to work around the demands of the field. According to Rev. Dr. Brewster, when schools began to be established on Ames in the very early 1900s, students often only went to school for only a few months out of the year, sometime only from July to the beginning of September, because they were needed on the farm at other times (Reagon 188). According to interviews with former Ames students who went to school in the 1940s, school would often begin in August and go until September, when the students would take about a month off to help in the fields. They would then start school again after the harvest and attend until May (Anderson, Ruble). Students often had to complete chores on the farm before school or after school (Hunt; Anderson, Ruble). This

made it more difficult for the students to complete their studies. In addition, because students walked to school, weather would sometimes prevent them from attending. Some students would be brought to school by their fathers on horses or occasionally in a wagon when the weather was quite bad, but some had to stay home (Givens). Despite these obstacles, records from the school board indicate that children rarely missed school when it was in session, with an average attendance of 80%-95% throughout the school year in both black and white schools. In addition, very few days are reported by teachers as having been lost to any cause. However, many of the students attending were not in the appropriate grade for their age, whether because they were forced to skip a year because of family demands, were held back due to inadequate work, etc. For example, for the 1939-1940 school year, the all-black Jopic School had in the second grade a seven, eight, nine, and thirteen year old (Fayette County School Records). Also, though many of the students went on from the primary schools at Ames to attend and complete high school, many, particularly in the black community, did not because of obligation on the farm, lack of transportation, etc. (Hunt). Those who did go on to high school appreciated the education they had received at Ames and recall not feeling behind in studies to any of the students who had been educated in cities (Anderson, Ruble).

Another unique aspect for the schools in rural locations such as Ames was the role of the teachers. In the early 1900s, most of the teachers were quite young with very little schooling. Rev. Dr. William Herbert Brewster stated that his schooling in the early 1900s began “in a cabin in a cotton field with a teacher who had been fortunate to have completed the sixth and seventh grade” (Reagon 188). Even as time went on, most teachers in rural areas were first year teachers who stayed at the school for only one or two years (Black, Helen). For example, Ms. Hazel Givens was twenty years old and had just completed two years at the Mississippi Synodical

School in Holly Springs, Mississippi, and received her teaching certificate when she taught her only year at Ames in 1934-1935 (Cotton). In addition, Raymond Anderson, a student at the Ames School in the 1930s, did not have any single teacher for more than three years during his nine years in school (Anderson, Raymond). Most of these teachers, however, see their short time at a rural school as extremely instrumental in shaping them as teachers (Rosser; Givens). Ms. Givens recalls this period as “a learning experience for the students and the teachers” (Cotton). The deep sense of community throughout the rural areas seemed to decrease discipline problems as well (Givens). Though most Ames teachers boarded during the week rather than living on the Ames Plantation, students, teachers, and parents in these small schools all became quite close (Givens; Anderson, Ruble). Ms. Givens recalls visiting each of her fifteen student’s parents often (Cotton), and Ms. Gracie Black, a former student at Ames, kept in touch with her first grade teacher until the teacher died (Black, Gracie). In addition, the students seemed to have good relations with one another, whether their parents were supervisors or field hands. They all became friends and supported one another (Givens). The older children would often help teach the younger children by sitting near them and assisting in their assignments (Black, Gracie). In addition, many of the older boys would come to school early during the winter to begin a fire to warm the schoolhouse before the younger children arrived (“Stories of Happenings”).

Not much is known about the origins of the schools at Ames. According to a Fayette County School Grade Book from the Ames School for the year 1922-1923, a one room wood frame schoolhouse for the all-white Ames School was erected in 1915 (see Image 1). A record from 1928 indicates that it opened in 1920, and records throughout the 1930s report that the school opened in 1917 or 1918. No matter the exact day of its beginnings, the school was operating by 1920 and had between ten and thirty students each year until its close in 1940

(Fayette County School Records). Hobart Ames is said to have established the school to act as a school for the children of the employees on his increasingly large land base (“Ames One-Room Schoolhouse”). Though Mr. Ames seemed to take little interest in the school itself (Givens), he did provide the funds for the furnishings and firewood (“Stories of Happenings”). Mrs. Ames seemed to take more of an interest in the school, occasionally visiting it and providing books for the library (Givens).

Though the building was provided by Mr. Ames, the teacher’s salary was provided by Fayette County Schools. Mrs. Lucille German Tipler, who taught at the school from 1928-1931, received a salary of \$50/month from the county, as well as \$10/month to help pay for cleaning and maintaining the school (“Stories of Happenings”). Ms. Givens received a salary of \$60/month for the 1934-1935 school year (Cotton). In addition to this, the school would put on fundraisers to help pay for maintaining the school. They would have box suppers, where members of the community would buy a dinner in a box prepared by a local woman or female student, as well as Christmas plays for the parents (Anderson, Ruble). Parents were often responsible for buying school supplies and books for their children (Black, Gracie). The Ames School did, however, have a good library from which the children could borrow books to read. The library contained books such as *The Little Engine That Could*, *Brer Rabbit*, *Tarzan*, and *Call of the Wild* (Black, Gracie; Anderson, Ruble). By 1923, the school had fifty-eight books, and the collection grew each year (Fayette County School Records).

Students at the Ames School would bring their lunches to school each day, for it was too far for them to walk home to eat (Anderson, Ruble). They would often sing religious and patriotic songs (Black, Gracie). The students would get a recess during the day in which they

would play ball, hide and seek, tag, etc. On rainy days, they would play musical chairs or telephone inside (Givens; Anderson, Ruble).

After finishing the eighth grade at the Ames School, most students would go on to attend Grand Junction High School in Grand Junction, Tennessee (Anderson, Ruble).

The Ames School closed in 1940 because the Fayette County School Board would not support a school that had less than ten students, and in this year the tenth student graduated eighth grade. The students at Ames then began taking the bus to attend Grand Junction Elementary School (Anderson, Ruble). Today, the school has been moved about 500 yards southwest of its original location. It is part of the Ames Heritage Village, which serves as a teaching tool about life on a plantation (Cotton).

Though there seems to have been little hostility between the black and white communities at Ames, and blacks are said to have been treated “well” by the white community, the black and white students seemed to have had little regular interaction with one another (Black, Gracie; Anderson, Ruble). When interviewed in 1997, the white school teacher Ms. Givens could not recall anything about the black students or schools at Ames (Givens). Ms. Mary Hunt, who attended the all-black school Jones Chapel, reports having some interaction with the white children (Hunt). Despite this pleasant, though infrequent, interaction between black and white children, it is clear that the black schools in the area were inferior to the white schools, as could be expected in rural Tennessee. The black population of Ames was much larger than the white population; therefore, there were at least three all-black schools opened on the Ames Plantation in the early 1900s.

The first all black school at Ames was New Zion. Grade books from the 1930s and 1940s report this school as opening as early as 1870 and as late as 1897. Because the records were

destroyed, we cannot say with certainty which, if any, of these dates are correct and under what circumstances the school opened. The earliest records we have from the school is from the 1922-1923 school year, and by that time the school had just under 100 students (Fayette County School Records). The second all black school to open at Ames was Jones Chapel School. School grade books from the 1920s and 1930s set this school's date of erection between 1904 and 1921. The school book from the 1922-1923 school year states that it was erected in 1921, indicating that this date is correct. It may be the case, however, that the school was founded before this and the building was erected in 1921 (see Image 2). Whatever the case, Jones Chapel School was open by the 1922-1923 school year when it had about 50 students (Fayette County School Records). According to Ms. Mary Hunt, who attended school at Jones Chapel in the 1940s, by that time it was a two room schoolhouse in which a teacher taught grades 1-4 and the principal taught grades 5-8 (Hunt). The final public black school at Ames was Jopic School, which operated as a Fayette County School by the 1935-1936 school year. No records indicate when this school began, but about fifty students attended school in this one room frame schoolhouse in 1936 (Fayette County School Records).

Most of the teachers at these black schools had attended normal, or teacher training, school, but not college (Fayette County School Records). Like most of the white teachers, many of the black teachers did not live at Ames, but rather boarded during the week (Hunt).

Unlike the Ames School, in 1922, Jones Chapel had no books (Fayette County School Records). Most of the books that the black schools did acquire were second-hand books from the white schools. The students were required to buy their own supplies and textbooks. Many of the students would share their supplies with those who could not afford the books (Hunt). In addition, the toilets and wells at the schools were often reported to be unsanitary (Fayette County

School Records). The teachers and students would conduct various fundraising activities, such as plays, to go toward maintaining the schools and acquiring books (Hunt; Fayette County School Records). Students at the different black schools would occasionally collaborate to put on these plays, and graduation was attended by many members of the community (Hunt).

According to an interview with a former student, after walking to school each morning, students would sing and pray in the schoolhouse. They would then learn English, spelling, arithmetic, geography, science, etc. During recess, they would run and play with marbles. All students brought their lunches to school (Hunt).

It seems that black students were less likely to go on to high school after they graduated from the eighth grade at a school at Ames. Though many went to high school, many had to stay home for various reasons. In addition, many of the students who did attend some high school did not go on to graduate (Hunt).

These black schools at Ames closed down in the 1960s with the integration of schools and the spreading of the use of buses to transport children from rural areas to and from the schools in the cities (Fayette County School Records).

### **Conclusion**

Though these rural schools of the early 1900s were not perfect, many of the students and teachers lament the fact that community schools like those at Ames have now largely disappeared with the consolidation of schools (Anderson, Ruble). Students attending school today may be surprised by the concept of a small, one-room school house to which students had to walk after working on the farm, “there was nothing wrong with it, it was just the way it was” (Rosser).

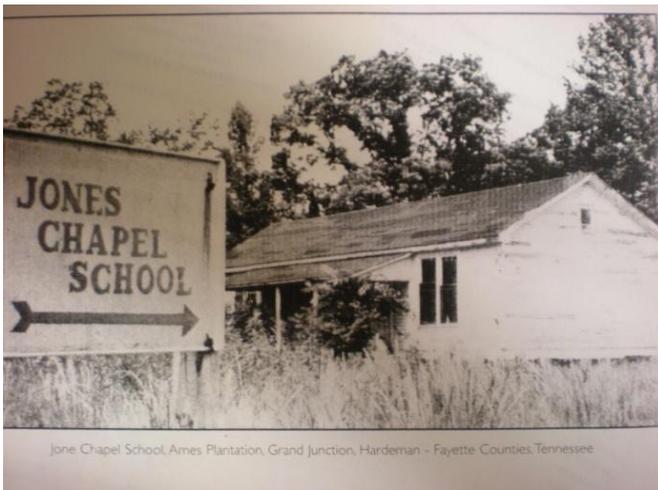
The struggle for a public school system in Tennessee that would educate all of her children was a long and difficult one full of objections and politics; however, due to the dedication of numerous people from a variety of backgrounds and political beliefs, in the end, a public education system was established during the reconstruction period which has had a lasting impact on creating the school systems which Tennessee enjoys today. Though problems still plague schools throughout the state, all kids in Tennessee, white or black, rich or poor, urban or rural, now have access to an education. As John Eaton, a major advocate of schools in Tennessee, stated many years ago, “Whatever education has been accomplished among the people cannot be taken from them” (Armstrong 230).

**Image 1:**



A picture of the newly refurbished Ames School house (“Ames One-Room Schoolhouse”)

**Image 2:**



A picture of Jones Chapel School taken by Mr. Jimmie T. Jones (Jones 238)

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