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Origin of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute

Edmund H. Dryer

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Origin of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute

Edmund H. Dryer

Scarce booklet by white resident of Tuskegee, Alabama on the establishment of Tuskegee Institute. This booklet seems to have been reprinted by a firm in Birmingham (also in 1938) but this is the author's original, self-published issue. Signed by Dryer on the title page. Hard-to-find, Tuskegee-related publication, especially signed.

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ORIGIN OF TUSKEGEE NORMAL
AND INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE

By

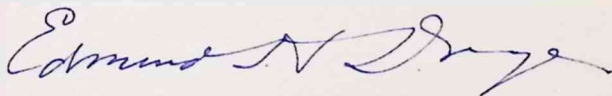
EDMUND H. DRYER

ORIGIN OF TUSKEGEE NORMAL AND INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE

By

EDMUND H. DRYER

*(Author of Dryer's Supreme Court
Bankruptcy Law)*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Edmund H. Dryer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E" and a long, sweeping tail.

In 1874 the white race reassumed political, as it had always maintained personal, dominance in the South. The Negro, who had, under provisional government, been allowed to vote, was disfranchised, producing a situation which still continues to exist. Except in rare and isolated instances, there was no individual unfriendliness on the part of either race toward the other on account of color or previous condition of servitude. That feeling still prevails. The white man simply decided he alone would govern, and proceeded to carry his decision into practical effect. Force, and other less justifiable means, were used; but no more than were necessary thoroughly to accomplish the end designed. Houston was elected governor of Alabama, and with him a solid white democratic house and a solid white democratic senate. At the same time Robert F. Ligon, of Tuskegee, was elected lieutenant governor. His son, of the same name, is now Clerk of the Supreme Court. To a race complaisant by nature, and who, in great part, had recently been slaves, this did not seem to be much out of the usual order

of things. To the white race it also seemed a matter of course, whether it was or was not a dispensation of Divine Providence.

In 1880 Tuskegee, in the heart of the Black Belt, was a happy spot in which to live. The War between the States had ended fifteen years before. There was plenty to eat and little to wear; but there was rugged individuality and contentment everywhere. The people loved each other. Every door was wide open to decent strangers. The relations between the white and colored races were cordial and friendly. Lewis Adams, a colored man, had a shop where were made the utensils of tin used by all the housewives of the town. He covered with tin roofing the business houses. Raymond Thweatt, also a colored man, did a great part of the village carpentry work. John Knight, another colored man, was, by the white democratic town council, made night marshal, a position he filled from a time soon after the end of the Civil War until his recent death at the age of nearly one hundred years. The three largest business houses were those of Thomas B. Dryer, M. B. Swanson, and Campbell & Wright.

Schools for colored pupils had been established at Talladega, Alabama, and at other sundry points in the South, by good Northern people. White "missionaries" were sent down as superintendents to conduct them. They did, and are still doing, useful work. While Thomas B. Dryer was not opposed to such schools, these were not, in his opinion and in the

opinion of such men as M. B. Swanson and George W. Campbell, built on the best foundation. They thought there would be more sympathetic cooperation, and, therefore, more rapid and solid progress made if principals, faculty, and pupils were of the same race; and that, as a logical deduction, a great Negro Normal School of that type, backed by white influence and protection, should be set up in the heart of the Black Belt of Alabama. Therefore, they took steps to bring such an institution into being. A. L. Brooks, lawyer and publisher of the Macon Mail, a local newspaper, was member of the House from Macon County, of which Tuskegee is the county seat. He offered the bill, No. 165, in the House. Mr. Speaker of the House, N. H. R. Dawson, of Selma, the first name called on passage, voted for the measure. It received in the House 48 yeas and 20 nays; and, in the Senate, 21 yeas and 7 nays. Of the 48 yeas in the House, 33 were from the Black Belt, and 15 from the other part of the state. Of the 21 yeas in the Senate, 16 were from the Black Belt and 5 from the other part of the state. In the House, of those from the Black Belt who voted, three-fourths were for and one-fourth against; and, in the Senate, of those from the Black Belt who voted, four-fifths were for and one-fifth against the bill. A tabulation of the vote in both houses follows:

HOUSE

Representatives from the Black Belt voting AYE, 33:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Post Office</i>	<i>County</i>
N. H. R. Dawson, Speaker	Selma	Dallas
A. W. Agnew	Providence	Pickens
J. T. Armstrong	Pine Level	Bullock
A. M. Avery	Havana	Hale
W. H. Barnett	Indian Branch	Pike
W. B. S. Beard	Carrolton	Pickens
M. J. Bulger	Dadeville	Tallapoosa
M. T. Brassfield	Forkland	Greene
A. L. Brooks	Tuskegee	Macon
H. H. Brown	Northport	Tuscaloosa
E. L. Brown	Hurtville	Russell
P. M. Callaway	Newton	Dale
J. F. Cowart	Troy	Pike
J. N. Gilmore	Gaston	Sumter
W. F. Glover	Butler	Choctaw
W. F. Hogue	Marion	Perry
C. C. Langdon	Mobile	Mobile
W. T. Lary	Coosada	Elmore
T. M. McCullough	Pine Level	Montgomery
R. S. Nolen	Nixburg	Coosa
J. J. Owens	Rutledge	Crenshaw
R. H. Powell	Union Springs	Bullock
Thos. H. Price	Mobile	Mobile
J. M. Sanders	Elba	Coffee
T. S. Sowell	Brewton	Escambia
L. B. Sheldon	Mobile	Mobile
W. C. Thomas	Gold Hill	Chambers
M. Walker	Uniontown	Marengo
M. B. Wellborn	Eufaula	Barbour
J. M. White	Clayton	Barbour
W. L. Wilson	Chapel Hill	Chambers
N. Wright	Forest Home	Butler
W. W. Wright	Auburn	Lee

HOUSE

Representatives from the Black Belt voting NAY, 11:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Post Office</i>	<i>County</i>
W. C. Billingslea	Browns	Dallas
S. E. Bowdon	Gordon	Henry
J. C. Camp	Barnsville	Marion
A. C. Davidson	Uniontown	Perry
J. E. Head	Rock Mills	Randolph
J. L. Johnson	Deatsville	Autauga
W. R. Nelson	Selma	Dallas
J. R. Ramsey	Gainsville	Sumter
J. R. Tyson	Haynesville	Lowndes
C. E. Waller	Greensboro	Hale
J. M. Wright	Seale	Russell

Representatives from North Alabama voting AYE, 15:

John H. Bankhead	Vernon	Lamar
R. M. Cunningham	Newburg	Franklin
J. G. Dement	Athens	Limestone
B. F. Floyd	Chulafinne	Cleburne
J. D. Hammond	Jacksonville	Calhoun
J. W. Heacock	Talladega	Talladega
H. S. C. Johnson	Blountsville	Blount
B. M. Long	Jasper	Walker
O. H. Milner	Guntersville	Marshall
J. R. Nowlin	Gadsden	Etowah
A. O. Pickens	Courtland	Lawrence
J. H. Sharit	New Castle	Jefferson
D. H. Shields	Centre	Cherokee
Wm. E. Skeggs	Somerville	Morgan
Wm. Taylor	Talladega	Talladega

Representatives from North Alabama voting NAY, 9:

E. C. Betts	Huntsville	Madison
J. W. Grayson	Gurleyville	Madison
C. P. Lane	Athens	Limestone

<i>Name</i>	<i>Post Office</i>	<i>County</i>
J. S. Maddox	Easonville	St. Clair
E. P. Martin	Mt. Hope	Lawrence
T. W. Newsom	Buckeye	Clay
W. H. Robinson	Scottsboro	Jackson
N. T. Underwood	Tuscumbia	Colbert
J. H. Vaught	Stevenson	Jackson

SENATE

Senators from the Black Belt voting AYE, 16:

G. R. Banks	Tallassee	Macon
S. H. Bowles	Troy	Pike
L. E. Brooks	Mobile	Mobile
J. W. Bush	Uniontown	Perry
Jerome Clanton	Eutaw	Greene
G. R. Farnham	Evergreen	Conecuh
Geo. P. Harrison	Opelika	Lee
J. T. Norman	Union Springs	Bullock
W. P. Oden	Wetumpka	Elmore
John D. Roquemore	Eufaula	Barbour
F. M. Rushing	Elba	Coosa
J. R. Satterfield	Selma	Dallas
Thos. J. Seay	Greensboro	Hale
A. G. Smith	Livingston	Sumter
W. Y. Titcombe	Monroeville	Monroe
Henry Ware	Bladon Springs	Clarke

Senators from the Black Belt voting NAY, 4:

A. C. Hargrove	Tuscaloosa	Tuscaloosa
W. D. McCurdy	Lowndesboro	Lowndes
S. R. Pate	Roanoke	Randolph
D. S. Troy	Montgomery	Montgomery

SENATE

Senators from North Alabama voting AYE, 5:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Post Office</i>	<i>County</i>
P. N. Duncan	Alpine	Talladega
L. W. Grant	Jacksonville	Calhoun
W. A. Musgrove	Montcalm	Fayette
T. N. McClellan	Athens	Limestone
Francisco Rice	New Market	Madison

Senators from North Alabama voting NAY, 3:

P. Brown	Fackler	Marshall
J. L. Cunningham	Gadsden	Etowah
J. C. Orr	Hartselle	Blount

A. L. Brooks, who introduced the bill, was, at the next general election, promoted to the state senate.

It will thus be seen that it was distinctly a Southern Black Belt measure, having originated there and having received its strongest support from white Democrats of that section. The Act was approved by the Democratic governor, Rufus W. Cobb, of Shelby County, and became a law on February 10, 1881 (Printed Acts of Alabama 1880-1881, page 395.) In this manner the school now known as Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute was chartered and endowed with a small annual appropriation of \$2,000.00. The object, as stated in the caption and in the Act, was: "To establish a Normal School for colored teachers at Tuskegee." Section 3 recites: "The school shall be under the

direction, control and supervision of a board of three commissioners, who shall consist of the following persons, to-wit: Thos. B. Dryer, M. B. Swanson, and Lewis Adams, who may fill any vacancy that may occur in the board of commissioners." Thus the school came to be founded, with a well-defined object, before any of its incorporators heard of Booker T. Washington, or he of the school: but of all men in the world, he was best qualified to carry the plan into successful execution. The colored man, Lewis Adams, lived in the rear of and on the same block with Thomas B. Dryer. No colored man was held in higher esteem than he. He was intelligent, honest, industrious, and reliable. Every Christmas morning the white boys of the neighborhood way-laid him, and to each he gave a newly coined silver dime.

Soon after the bill became a law, Thomas B. Dryer, stricken with mortal illness, retired to his home, whence he did not emerge, and where he died June 18, 1881. He evidently resigned on account of illness, and was succeeded by George W. Campbell, senior partner of Campbell & Wright, for on May 24, 1881, "G. W. Campbell, and others, Trustees," wrote to General S. C. Armstrong, Principal of Hampton Institute, for recommendation of one to take charge of the school. That letter is lost, but a copy of General Armstrong's reply of May 31, 1881, is in existence. In it he said: "The only man I can suggest is one Mr. Booker Washington, a graduate of this institution, a very competent,

capable mulatto, clear headed, modest, sensible, polite and a thorough teacher and superior man. The best man we ever had here." He was accepted, arrived at Tuskegee the latter part of June, 1881, and, with characteristic energy, opened school a few days later; for, on June 28, 1881, he wrote from Tuskegee to F. C. Briggs, Business Agent of Hampton Institute: "I will open school the first Monday in July. Judging from present prospects I shall have about thirty students the first day and a steady increase." Within two weeks he had contracted to purchase one hundred acres of land. On July 16, 1881, he wrote Mr. Briggs: "I opened school two weeks ago with thirty students, now I have over forty . . . I borrowed \$200.00 from General M., to be returned first of October next, with which to make the first payment on the land so that we could get immediate possession. The whole cost is \$500.00. For the payment of \$200.00 at the time named I have pledged my salary." His salary was derived from the state appropriation. This one hundred acres of land was owned by Col. W. B. Bowen. His residence on it had been destroyed by fire. By deed dated February 4, 1882, recorded in the probate office in Book 7, page 661, he and his wife, on a recited consideration of \$500.00, conveyed it to the Trustees of Tuskegee Colored Normal School. On this land were located the first buildings of the institution. With his own hands, aided by his students, Lewis Adams, Raymond Thweatt, and other colored people, the first house, a wooden structure, was erected.

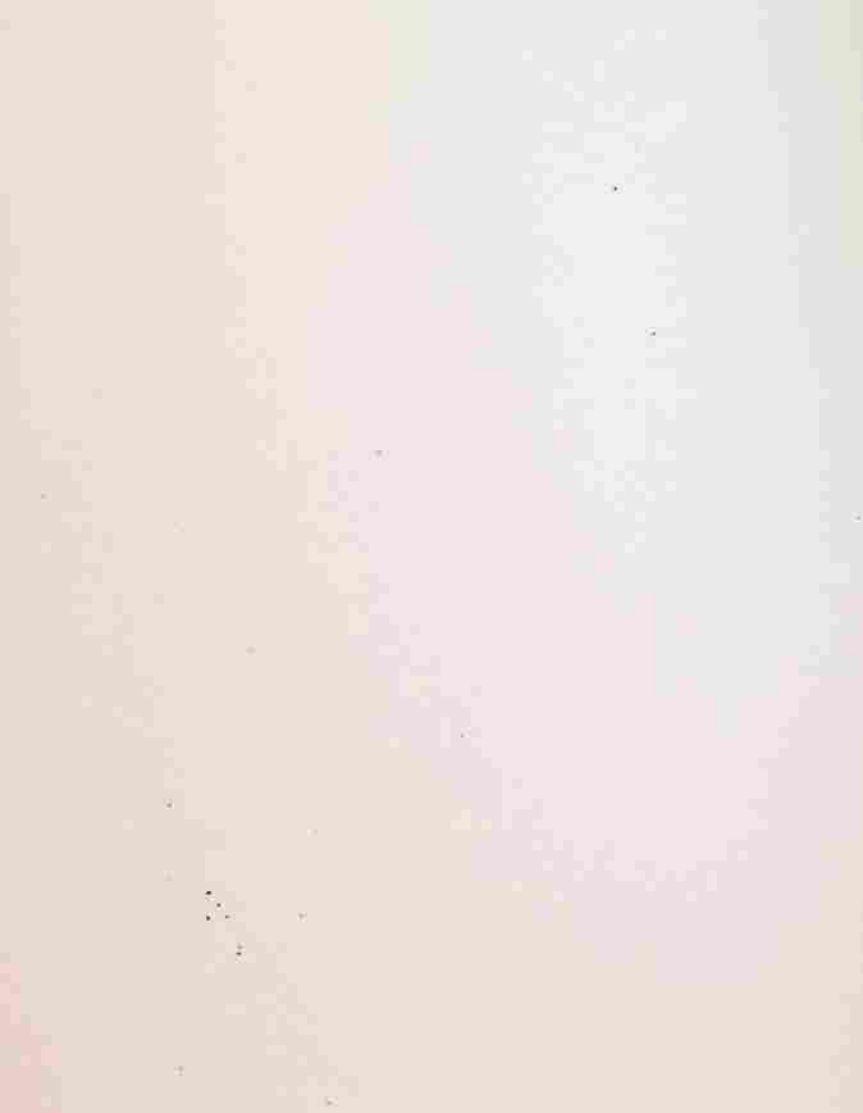
At that time the school had no commercial credit, and Washington was confronted with a situation which would have deterred one not possessed of iron will and infinite patience. After the death of T. B. Dryer in June, 1881, his eldest son, James B. Dryer, then but twenty-two years old, out of small individual savings, established a little store and from it furnished the school with groceries on credit until Washington could, as he did, from time to time make trips and secure donations to supplement the meager state appropriation. Campbell & Wright helped in the same way. This continued for several years. After the first building was finished, Washington wished to begin on the second, a brick structure, but, at the time, had neither money nor outside credit. James B. Dryer lent his individual credit, upon which the lime for the mortar was purchased. Sometime after 1907, when Edmund H. Dryer, second son of Thomas B. Dryer, moved to Birmingham, Alabama, Washington invited him to come to Tuskegee to draw his will. After details had been given by him, he said he desired they be explained to his wife out of his presence in a way to elicit from her a voluntary expression of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, because he wanted her to be content after his death. The proposed provisions of the will were thus explained to her. She desired no change, and so the will was drawn. This circumstance is related to show Washington's appreciation for what Thomas B. Dryer—a white man he had never personally known—had done for the colored race, and

his tender consideration for all with whom he had association.

Such was the origin of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Its corporate formation and educational design was conceived by prominent white people in Alabama, without whose influence and protection it could not have come into existence or long survived. Without Booker T. Washington the school could not have become the great institution it is. He took hold with a gentleness of spirit, a breadth of vision, an amplitude of wisdom, and strength of determination to succeed, rarely centered in one man.

Birmingham, Alabama,

May, 1938.



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