

Historical  
**SKETCH**  
OF THE  
Freedmen's Missions  
OF THE  
United Presbyterian Church,  
1862-1904.



Printing Department Knoxville College,  
1904.

Ralph W. McCreanahan

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## Our Missions in Virginia and North Carolina.

BY REV. J. W. WITHERSPOON, D. D., CORRESPONDING SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF FREEDMENS' MISSIONS.

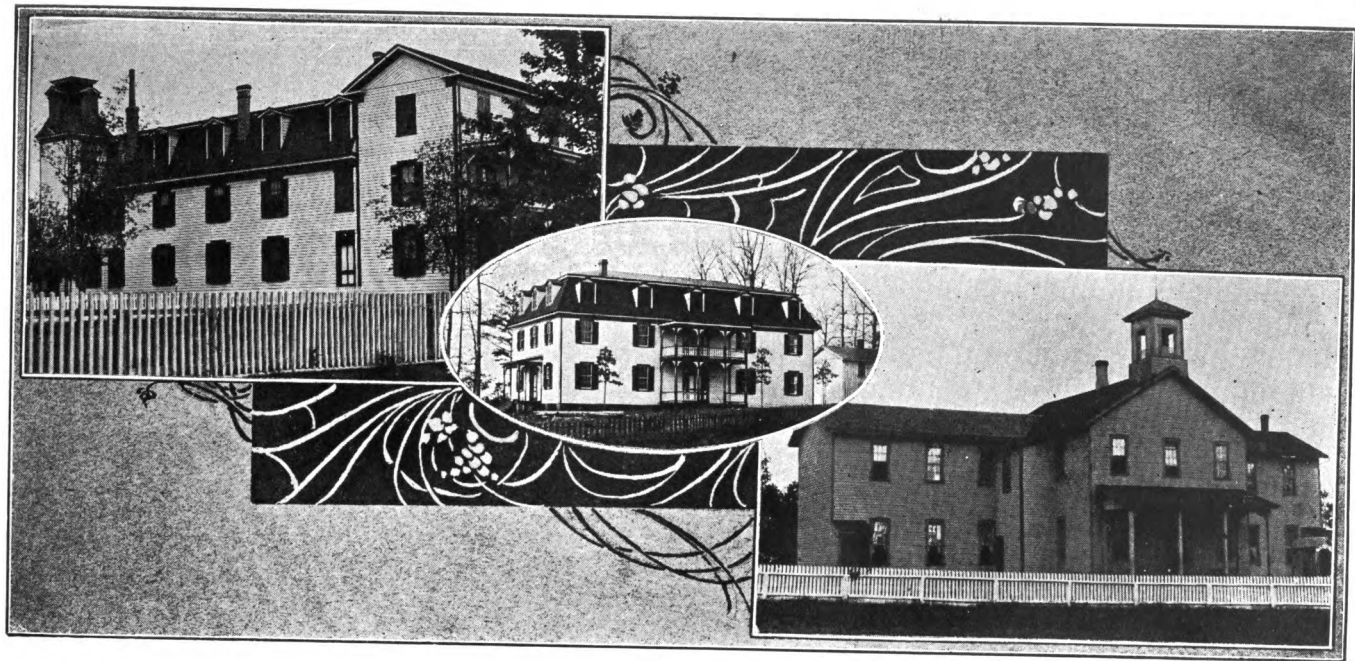
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**Chase City, Va.**—In Philadelphia at the meeting of the General Assembly, May 1876, Rev. J. Y. Ashenhurst came to the Corresponding Secretary with a personal plea for the Freedmen in and near Chase City, Va., and assigned many strong reasons why a mission should be established at that place. The matter was discussed at the next meeting of the Board, and very soon correspondence was opened with those who seemed to be interested in the work. Several communications were received from prominent citizens of the place strongly urging that this field was both needy and open for occupancy. Mr. John Thyne, a United Presbyterian, formerly of a congregation in Argyle Presbytery, but at this time residing near Chase City, forwarded to the Board a most practical plea for the Freedmen of the place, by proposing that if a mission were established there he would donate to the Board his home consisting of five acres of land on which was erected a good new two story dwelling. This plan was effective, the proposition was accepted, and it was resolved to begin the work. Mr. J. J. Ashenhurst son of Rev. J. Y. Ashenhurst, was appointed missionary. He secured a small room, very unsuitable but the best that could be procured and fitted it up, Mr. Thyne making desks for it free of charge, and opened the school on the sixth day of November, 1876. The school enrollment for the first six months was seventy three, and that of the Sabbath school for the same period was seventy eight.

Mr. Thyne, in fulfilment of his first promise, for-

warded to the Board a deed to his property, in fee simple, valued at \$2500, in April of 1877, and to show still further his interest in the work, sent a proposition to the effect, that if the Board would furnish the material, he would erect on the lot now deeded to it, a school building suitable for the mission. This proposition was also accepted and at the first of September, 1878, school opened in a new two story building containing chapel and three school rooms, at a cost of about \$800 to the Board. The school has been known ever since by the name, THYNE INSTITUTE. The school prospered, and to all appearance had a bright future. But soon a very bitter opposition to the whole work sprung up among the colored people themselves. It soon became known that the opposition was generated by a colored Baptist preacher who was pastor of a large congregation in the vicinity. It appeared that he had expected to be given a place in the school, and on discovering that his services were not required set himself the task of breaking down the entire work. And for a time it seemed as though he would accomplish his aim. He went into the "Baptist Association" and had resolutions adopted denouncing the movement and warning the colored people connected with the Baptist church not to send their children to the school under penalty of expulsion from the church. The prospect was very discouraging for a time but the workers in the missions behaved themselves wisely and acted prudently toward all, and soon a reaction set in, and the mission grew and prospered. During the entire period of the existence of the mission the school has maintained a yearly average attendance of perhaps more than 200 in all departments, and the religious work has had a healthy and steady growth.

Rev. Matthew Clarke was appointed missionary to this field in 1878, and with his wife entered the field soon after, greatly to the profit of the work. He conducted religious services on Sabbath and frequently during the week and the interest seemed to deepen during his time in the field. Mr. J. J. Ashenurst resigned as principal of the school in 1880, and Mr. Clarke became the head of the school, and



School Building.

THYNE INSTITUTE, CHASE CITY, VA.  
Boys' Dormitory.

Girls' Dormitory.

had the entire work in his control. He also gave some time to a needy field about sixteen miles distant which afterward became a permanent mission. Mr. Clarke retired from the work at Chase City in the summer of 1881 and Rev. John A. Ramsay was chosen as his successor and served two years. The mission prospered under his labors, and in March, 1882, a congregation was organized with thirteen members. This was the signal for another systematic, organized effort on the part of the opposition to break down the work, but those who had been enrolled as members of the new organization suffered their persecution without flinching, the missionaries were prudent and trusting, and God overruled the worst of the opposers, for his glory and the good cause prospered. The heaviest shock the work had received came on the morning of May 15, 1883, when the teacher's home, the former residence of Mr. John Thyne was destroyed by fire. The fire originated in the attic when all were asleep, and the flames bursting through the ceiling of the room in which two of the teachers were sleeping was the first intimation of their danger; all escaped uninjured and succeeded in saving nearly all their furniture. The origin of the fire is unknown. The building was insured, and was soon replaced by another better adapted to the needs of the work.

Rev. J. A. Ramsay was transferred to another mission in the Summer of 1883, and Rev. J. H. Veazey took charge of this field where he labored successfully for ten years, resigning in 1893 to take up another line of work for the Master.

The work at the beginning of this administration had become crystalized, and was in readiness for rapid development, and its most permanent growth was secured during this period. The school work was enlarged, a Normal Department was added and also a primary training school. The industrial work was more fully emphasized. During this period the "Girls' Industrial Home" was erected at a cost of \$3,000 by the Women's Board, for students who came from distant places. They are under the care of a matron, taught the art of cooking and all

parts of housekeeping in a practical way in this home, and more recently a Department of Domestic Science has been established.

Rev. J. M. Moore, Ph. D., succeeded Mr. Veazey in 1893, and continues in charge of the work at the present writing. The work has been well done in all the years; and the congregation has enjoyed a healthy growth and is the largest as to membership of any of the missions of the church among the Freedmen. The school building has been enlarged, all the departments of the school maintained, a Domestic Science Department and an Agricultural Department added to the industrial line of instruction, and the whole enjoying the confidence and having the hearty approbation of both races in all the community.

**Bluestone, Va.**—As an outgrowth of the work at Chase City, a mission was begun at Bluestone, Va., about sixteen miles distant. There was in that vicinity a small United Presbyterian congregation composed mostly of colonists from the North. These people were earnest in their pleadings for a mission to be established for the Freedmen, and promised material aid in securing premises in case a mission be established. Meantime these people were maintaining a small Sabbath school for the colored people. The mission was established in 1880. Mr. Wm. McLean, formerly of Jamestown, Pa., donated ten acres of ground, beautifully situated, giving a fee simple deed for it to the Board of Freedmen's Missions. A frame building 40x60 feet, two stories high, containing chapel and three recitation rooms, was erected on it during the summer and winter of 1879. This work was done under the direction and management of Rev. Mathew Clarke who was then in charge of the Chase City mission. The school was opened February 16, 1880, with E. P. McLean, M. D., as principal. The colored people contributed \$150 in work toward the new building and the members of the Stanton congregation (white) about \$200 in work and material. The Board closed its report to the General Assembly in the May following in these words: "This field is one of special interest because of the very large number of colored people in the immediate vicinity; be-

cause of their destitution and ignorance, and because of the manifest providence which has led to the establishment of the mission where it is—located on a farm on which for many years the annual sale of slaves took place, for the market in the South or Gulf states. The ruins of the old jail in which the slaves, brought in from neighboring plantations for the market, were shut up are in full view from this house, where the free Gospel is now preached to them which, applied by the spirit, makes them free with the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free.”

Dr. McLean resigned the principalship March 25th, 1881, and Miss Helen McLean filled the position of principal to the close of the school term in May. Rev. Mathew Clarke retired from the work in this vicinity during the summer of 1881. Prof. J. A. Littell took charge of the school as principal, Sept. 1881, and continued in that position till the close of the school term, 1883. Meanwhile Rev. J. A. Ramsay of Chase City, preached occasionally in this mission, and upon retirement of Mr. Littell was transferred to Bluestone and became principal of the school and general missionary.

The next year 1884, on the 20th of April a congregation was organized with ten members. Mr. Ramsay remained in this field until 1890 when he resigned and retired from the work.

During the years of his service the work made commendable progress, and the congregation grew very encouragingly, but during those years there was noticeable a very decided change taking place in the community itself which suggested that the future of the mission as to its growth and success was, to say the least, doubtful. In the Spring of 1889 the Board called attention of the general assembly to these conditions in the following statement:—“Owing to the hard times last year many were forced to remove from the neighborhood, some going north others go in other directions. By these removals the membership of the congregation and the attendance at the school were decreased materially.” These conditions continued, and the exodus to other places of the colored people increased, until it was ascertained



that the colored population had decreased at least 50 per cent since the establishment of the mission and in the Spring of 1890, the Board recommended the removal of the mission to a more promising field and the general assembly approved the recommendation. During that summer, 1890, the removal of this mission was begun, Henderson, N. C., having been selected as a much more promising and needy field. It was decided however after a careful and prayerful examination of the field, not to remove the mission wholly, but to rearrange and reorganize it. Three small buildings were fitted up, on the grounds, one for a dwelling for the teachers and the other two for school purposes and the larger buildings, the schoolhouse and teacher's home, removed to the new field. The mission here was put in charge of Mr. W. M. Fowlkes and two teachers, and the Principal at Chase City supplied the mission with occasional preaching. Mr. Fowlkes studied theology privately and was sometime after ordained to the office of the holy ministry. The little congregation at Bluestone built for themselves a neat chapel with a very little assistance from the Board and still maintains a membership of about fifty. Mr. Fowlkes remained in the mission till Feb. 1901, when he resigned and was succeeded by Mr. Wm. G. Wilson. Mr. Wilson also studied privately and was subsequently ordained to the gospel ministry. The mission is doing good work in the limited field under his care at the present time.

**Norfolk, Va.**—In December, 1882, a few friends of the Freedmen raised a sum of money and sent it to Rev. Mathew Clarke under the direction of the Board, to explore needy fields in Virginia with a view to opening a Mission. Mr. Clarke went and after visiting several places returned, and reported to the Board that Norfolk with a school population of 4000 colored youths with accomodation for only 1000 in the public schools, and a sentiment prevalent among both white and colored citizens favorable to Negro education, was in his opinion a most promising field. The Board took the same view, and at once resolved that so soon as funds were received a

mission should be established there and shortly after this the Corresponding Secretary received a draft for \$400 from the same persons (residing in Chicago, Ill.) who had raised the fund for the exploring of the field with a request that it be used in establishing a mission at Norfolk. A meeting of the Board was called and it was resolved to open a mission at Norfolk at once; Rev. and Mrs. Matthew Clarke were appointed to the new field, who in a few days left for the work, arriving in Norfolk Jan. 15, 1883. The work was begun soon as a room could be procured, and from the start was most encouraging. Other teachers were sent, and other accommodations secured as suitable as possible, and the school continued to the end of the school year when Mr. Clarke sent his report to the Board which showed that 467 pupils had been enrolled, and that the attendance during the month of April was 342, making a total average for the three months just closed of 221. Mr. Clark closed his report with these earnest words: "Great expectations have been awakened by our enterprise among both colored and white, and we must not disappoint them. Our school was founded in prayer, and the Lord has heard our prayers and sent us the hungry to be fed. Dare we send them away empty? The Master says: 'They need not depart give ye them to eat.'"

In July of the same year the President of the Board, Dr. W. H. McMillan, and the corresponding secretary visited Norfolk, and with Mr. Clarke made a careful study of the field and held conferences with prominent men of the city of both races. It was agreed that the field was most important and should be occupied at once by the erection of permanent buildings. The committee before returning purchased a block of five lots fronting 125 feet on Princess Ann road, running along Cherry street 100 feet to Pine street, subject to the approval of the Board. The Board approved the purchase. Plans and specifications for a school building 64x84 feet and three stories high above the basement were prepared, and the contract for the erection of the building was awarded to Murray and Jarvis, of Norfolk, for the

sum of \$15,545, who completed the contract in a satisfactory manner. The school was opened in the new building Sept. 1st., 1884, one year after the purchase of the land. The enrollment of the school during the school year of 1884 and 1885, reached the total of 986 in the day school, and 64 in the night school whose names did not appear on the day school rolls, making a grand total of 1050 pupils who received some instructions in the school during the year. The religious work was carried on with much vigor in connection with the every day work in the school, and on Sabbath. The Sabbath school had an enrollment of 398 for the year. The usual bitter opposition from the pastors of colored churches and others in the city soon made its appearance, and has been kept up with more or less vehemence ever since. During the summer and autumn of 1885 the teachers' home was erected on a lot adjoining the school lot and was occupied by the teachers shortly after the holidays, 1886. This year was not less encouraging than the preceding one. On the 25th of April, 1886, a congregation was organized with 14 members and the first communion was held on the same day, a large and interested audience being present to witness the ceremony.

All this work was undertaken and carried forward with such encouraging success under the management of Rev. M. Clarke the principal and pastor, and at the end of the school year he resigned his place, and retired from the work. Rev. W. L. Wallace, D. D., was elected to succeed Mr. Clarke in this great work. He served until the close of the school year 1889, when on account of failing health he resigned. Rev. William Wallace succeeded him and served as principal for a short time. Rev. David R. McDonald received appointment as his successor, and entered upon his duties in February 1890, and served one year retiring in February 1891. The work during these two administrations was uninterrupted, keeping up well to the high standard set for it at the first. On account of many of the day scholars not attending Sabbath school the religious work seemed small in comparison. Accordingly, a regu-

lation was enforced to give only those pupils the privilege of the day school who would regularly attend the Sabbath school. This rule has been strictly enforced since 1889, and during that period "Norfolk Mission College" has the largest and best Sabbath school in the city.

Rev. J. B. Work succeeded Mr. McDonald in the principalship, and served faithfully and successfully till the end of the school year 1896.

During this administration the work assumed perhaps a more permanent form than at any previous time. The primary training school was put under a principal and the curriculum made to include and not to exceed the branches usually taught in a city high school, all of which had been done to some degree previous to this time, but now is made a part of the established plan of the mission. The industrial work received a forward impulse also. From the beginning sewing had been a part of the work of every day and printing had been introduced and taught in a small way, but now the facilities for doing better and larger work are increased and an instructor employed who gives his whole time to the work of the printing office and a large number of boys and girls learn the art in its different parts. This department has ever since been one of the prominent and profitable features of the industrial work at Norfolk.

Dr. Work was succeeded by Rev. Wm. McKirahan as principal and pastor in 1896, who is still in charge of the work. When he took charge of the work the plant consisted of the college building, the teachers' home and a workshop in which is now located the heating apparatus for heating the school and home. It also contains the printing department. A fourth building was erected by the principal without any expense to the Board or the church. This one is occupied by the Domestic Science Department. This department was the first to be established upon this plan among all of our missions.

A few years ago the Board purchased the lot cornering on Princess Ann avenue and Chapel street, giving the mission the entire front on Princess Ann avenue from Cherry to Chapel street on which stood

a building notorious for the wickedness done within its walls. This building has been removed to the rear of the lot and fixed up for a dormitory for girls. The fifth building is a church now in the process of building on the corner of the above said lot.

The school has always maintained a high standard both in discipline and in scholarly excellence. And the religious work has from the beginning until the present received the earnest attention and united effort of all the workers in the mission. This has been our largest school and most largely attended mission, having a total enrollment for the twenty years of its service of 14,138, and an average of 706 for each year.

The largest yearly enrollment in the Sabbath school was in 1898 when it reached the grand total of 1,162. The total enrollment in the Sabbath school for the last ten years has been 8,035, a yearly average of 803.

**Henderson, N. C.**—The establishment of a mission in this place was decided upon by the Board in 1889, subject to the approval of the General Assembly. This approval was given at the next meeting of that court, and steps were taken to carry out the purpose. In the early autumn of 1890 the Board purchased a beautiful tract containing thirteen acres just outside the limits of the town, having thereon a good dwelling of six rooms, an orchard, shrubbery and a fine spring of running water, for the sum of \$1,700. So soon as practicable after the purchase the grounds were properly fenced and otherwise prepared for the work of the mission. This work was done under the supervision of Rev. John D. Irons, D. D., who was spending a short time in the place, without any compensation. The large school building and the teachers' dwelling at Bluestone were removed and re-erected on these grounds, and thus the mission premises were put in readiness for opening the work. The mission was opened as a new station September 1, 1891, under the superintendence of Rev. J. M. Fulton, D. D., who had been elected principal early in the preceding summer. The school opened with 58 pupils, but grew so rapidly that additional workers were sent at the call of the principal in only a few



NORMAL INSTITUTE, Henderson, N. C.

months. The first year showed an enrollment of 586. The work was begun and carried on along all lines—educational, religious and industrial—and was pushed with the vigor for which the principal was noted in all his work. Before the year was ended, he was calling for larger school buildings, a separate building for sewing and housekeeping classes and cheap dormitory buildings, (one for boys and one for girls) where boys and girls could board themselves and go to school, and this additional equipment was all supplied just as speedily as possible. At the end of the first year the mission was thoroughly established upon a sure foundation and the principal was esteemed by the colored people as a veritable Moses, come to lead them out, and by the white people profoundly respected. The second year was a repetition of the first with the same principal and practically the same teachers. At the close of that year the principal wrote: "In the day school we have 702 enrolled; 425 of them are regular attendants. The night school for five months reached 200 of an enrollment, so we have been permitted to reach the minds of 900 during the year. In our religious services we were permitted to teach and preach to as many more. We have had Sabbath school and preaching every Sabbath with an average attendance of 600."

Dr. Fulton, on account of failing health, retired from the work at the end of this second year, greatly to the regret of the mission and of the Board. In closing his second and last annual report to the Board he said. "I am sorry to leave the work. It is a work to command the best energies of any man in the church. With all the burdens it has its bright side, and to have the consciousness that you are the instrument of preaching the Gospel to the poor makes up for all the isolation and ostracism that come to such workers in this southland."

Rev. C. L. McCracken succeeded Dr. Fulton, taking charge of the work September 1, 1893, and continued faithfully and doing the work efficiently until June 28, 1898, when the Master called him from the field to his reward. He rests from his labors and his works follow him. During his service the mission maintained its high standard both in attendance and

in the efficiency of the work. The most important advance was made, however, in the religious work. There had been embarrassment from the beginning in conducting this work owing to the fact that the Presbyterian Board of Freedmen's Missions had a small congregation and Sabbath school in the town of Henderson and any step taken by us looking toward the organization of the religious work was liable to be construed as in opposition to their work. This difficulty was overcome by our Board's purchasing their property consisting of lot and a neat and comfortable church building, and a parsonage, (paying for all \$1,700), the congregation and the Presbytery, to which it belonged, having given their consent to the transfer. When this arrangement had been completed Rev. J. M. Moore and the session of the Chase City congregation came to Henderson and reorganized the congregation as a United Presbyterian congregation, January 14, 1898, with a roll of 25 members and two ruling elders. Thus the former embarrassments being removed the religious work took on new life and has gone forward encouragingly to the present. The death of Mr. McCracken was greatly lamented by the colored people and by the white citizens of the place. He had endeared himself to all the community by his gentle and Christian life, his scholarly and manly bearing in all his relations. The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.

Rev. A. N. Porter succeeded to the principalship upon the death of Mr. McCracken and served one year when he retired and Rev. D. A. W. Johnson took up the work and carried it on for one year. At the close of the school term, 1900, he resigned and the mission was again left without an official head.

At this juncture the Board decided upon making a change of administration, and to place the entire work here under the care of a colored principal. Accordingly Rev. J. L. Cook, who for ten years had been in charge as pastor and principal in the mission at Athens, Tenn., was placed at the head of the mission to have charge of the secular and religious work, and was given a corps of carefully selected and tried workers. He entered this field in the summer of

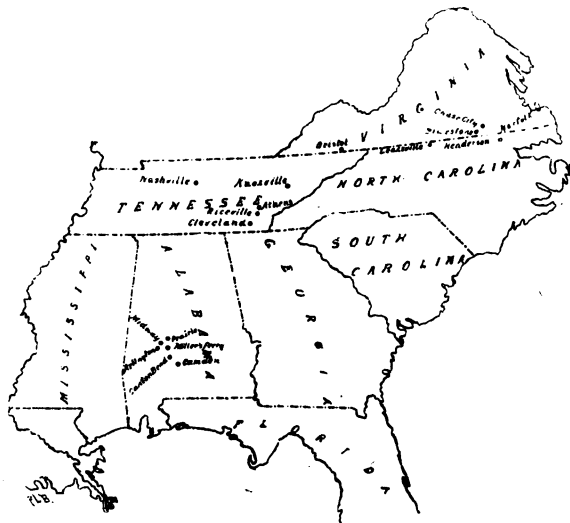


1900. The mission prospered under his administration. He labored earnestly and incessantly—beyond his power to endure—until July 5, 1903, when he entered into rest. The Rev. John A. Cotton was transferred from the mission at Cleveland, Tenn., and succeeds Mr. Cook, having begun his work August 1903.

In all this eastern group of missions industrial work is carried on according to the facilities at hand in each place—cooking, sewing, dressmaking, printing and agriculture. In Chase City and Norfolk a regular and well equipped Department of Domestic Science is maintained. The woman's Board pays all the salaries of industrial teachers except the teachers of printing and agriculture.







MAP SHOWING THE FREEDMEN'S MISSION STATIONS OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.