

Mary McLeod Bethune's Correspondence (Flagler County Black History)

The Vocational Agriculture Building¹ (*fig. 1*) (also known as the Little Red School House) located at 1001 E. Howe St., Bunnell, Florida (on the campus of Bunnell Elementary School) is a living museum of vintage schoolhouse memorabilia and an assortment of other interesting historical artifacts (*figures 2 & 3*). Among these artifacts is an original signed letter dated August 27, 1918 by the famous educator and Civil Rights activist, Mary McLeod Bethune (*fig. 4*), and a framed photograph collage of her (*fig. 5*). Following is the transcribed letter signed by Mary McLeod Bethune (*fig. 6*):

“Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls
Mary McLeod Bethune, Principal
Daytona, Florida August 27, 1918
Mr. E. B. Loughbridge
Bunnell, Fla.

My Dear Mr. Loughbridge,

Your good letter of August 24, [1918] has interested me very much. I can now recommend to you two splendid young women who, I am sure will be of great benefit to you in the work among Negro children, in your county. Their names are: Mae L. Reece and Maud Leaver, both holding State certificates. I may be able to send you the names of some others a little later.

Will you be kind enough to tell me the number of teachers that you need, the situation of your vacant schools and send me some application blanks that the young women may apply intelligently?

I am pleased to serve you in this capacity. I am deeply interested in the rural school work among my people and am advising these young women to do good practical work and to be real lightholders in their community.

When in Daytona, come see our plant. We shall be glad to know you better and perhaps serve you more effectively.

Yours respectfully,
Mary McLeod Bethune”

Obviously, as principal of the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, Mary McLeod Bethune, was active in the job placement of the school's graduates. Additionally, she was interested in placing graduates in rural areas, which had African American children in need of education, such as Flagler County, Florida.²

Annual Address of 1922 for the Flagler Institute

Mary McLeod Bethune, principal of the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for colored students, delivered the annual address on May 6, 1922 at the Flagler Institute (Colored School), which was located in Bunnell, Flagler County. The *Flagler Tribune* reported, “Mrs. Bethune is a speaker of great force and an entertainer of reputation.”

Brief Biography of Mary McLeod Bethune

Mary McLeod Bethune was the daughter (the fifteenth of seventeen children) of former slaves (Sam and Patsy McIntosh McLeod). She was born on July 10, 1875 in a small log cabin in Mayesville, South Carolina. As a young girl, she worked in agricultural fields picking cotton and assisted her mother doing laundry for several white people in nearby communities. It was during this time she realized that learning, reading, writing and pursuing a formal education was important for the future of herself and African Americans.

She attended a local segregated one-room black schoolhouse and was the only child in her family to attend school. When she came home, she would teach her siblings what she had learned that day. Emma Jane Wilson was Mary’s teacher, and she assisted her in getting a scholarship to the Scotia Seminary (now the Barber-Scotia College)³ where she graduated in 1893. She then attended the Dwight L. Moody Institute for Home and Foreign Missions (now the Moody Bible Institute),⁴ and inspired to become a missionary in Africa. After she graduated in 1895, she was informed that black missionaries were not needed in Africa, so she shifted her life’s mission towards a career as a teacher and activist.

In 1898, she married Albertus Bethune and had a son in 1899 named Albert McLeod Bethune. In 1907, Albertus moved to South Carolina leaving the family behind, but she never divorced him and kept her married name.

In 1904, she founded the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute (Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls)⁵ in Daytona, Florida. In 1923, this school merged with the Cookman Institute for Men and became the Bethune-Cookman College. This college was one of the few places during this time where African American students could pursue a college degree. It is now known as Bethune-Cookman University⁶ and is located in Daytona Beach, Florida.

In addition to being an educator, she developed skills in organizing and fundraising while president of the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls/Bethune-Cookman College and founded the National Council of Negro Women⁷ in 1935.

As a political activist, she became involved with government service and national policies working with the administrations of four presidents of the United States. During President Calvin Coolidge’s administration, she participated in a conference regarding child welfare. President Herbert Hoover’s administration appointed her to a committee on child health, and she served on the Commission on Home Building and Home Ownership. In 1935, she became a special advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt⁸

on minority affairs. In 1938, she was appointed the director of the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration,⁹ which was a Federal agency that was created through the Works Progress Administration.¹⁰ This appointment made Bethune the first African American female director of a Federal agency. She also served on the Federal Council of Negro Affairs “Black Cabinet”¹¹ during Roosevelt’s administration, which was an informal coalition of black organizations that worked to ensure blacks received New Deal aid. In the early 1950s, President Harry Truman appointed her to a committee that concentrated on national defense. President Truman also appointed her as an official delegate to a presidential inauguration in Liberia.

Bethune was an early member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).¹² In 1945, she represented this group, along with W.E.B. Du Bois¹³ (*fig. 7*) and other members, at the conference on the founding of the United Nations.

In the late 1940s, Bethune retired and moved back to Daytona Beach, Florida where she died on May 18, 1955.

Mary McLeod Bethune’s Legacy

In 1973, Bethune was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

On July 10, 1974, (the anniversary of her 99th birthday) a monument known as the Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Statue (*fig. 8*) was erected in Washington, D.C. Bethune became the first black leader and the first woman to have a monument erected on public land in Washington, D.C.

In 1985, the United States Postal Service issued a 22-cent postage stamp (*fig. 9*) in the Black Heritage series featuring her portrait.

In 1994, the National Park Service purchased her last home in Washington, D.C. (which was also the first headquarters of the National Council of Negro Women). The site is now known as the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House (*fig. 10*) and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It features Bethune’s three-story Victorian town house and a carriage house where the National Archives for Black Women’s History is located.

Mary McLeod Bethune Statue in the National Statuary Hall

The National Statuary Hall is a chamber in the United States Capitol building in Washington, D.C. that features statues of prominent citizens. Each state contributes two statues for display in National Statuary Hall or elsewhere within the Capitol building.

On July 10, 2019 (the 144th anniversary of Mary Bethune’s birthday), Florida Governor Ron DeSantis formally asked U.S. Capitol officials to remove the statue of St. Augustine-born Confederate General Edmund Kirby Smith (1824 -1893), which has been on display since 1922, and replace it with a statue of Mary McLeod Bethune.

Governor DeSantis said, “Dr. McLeod Bethune’s statue will represent the best of who we are as Floridians to visitors from around the world in our nation’s Capital,” and, “Her legacy endures and will continue to inspire future generations.”

Mary McLeod Bethune is the first African American honored in the Statuary Hall Collection that is linked to a state (in 2013, a full-sized statue of Rosa Parks was displayed in Statuary Hall as part of the Architect of the Capitol, but it is not linked to a specific state.)

Sculptor Nilda Comas created Bethune’s 9-foot marble statue in Pietrasanta, Italy.

The statue will be moved from Italy and displayed in National Statuary Hall in 2020.

Figures

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Fig. 1. Agriculture Vocational Building - 1001 E. Howe St., Bunnell, Florida (on the campus of Bunnell Elementary School) - Front View. Photograph by Author (February 2019).



Fig. 2. Agriculture Vocational Building – Miscellaneous historical artifacts in a display cabinet in the back room. Photograph by Author (February 2019).



Fig. 3. Agriculture Vocational Building - Front of school room with a teachers desk, student desks, chalk board and a 48 Star USA flag. Photograph by Author (February 2019).

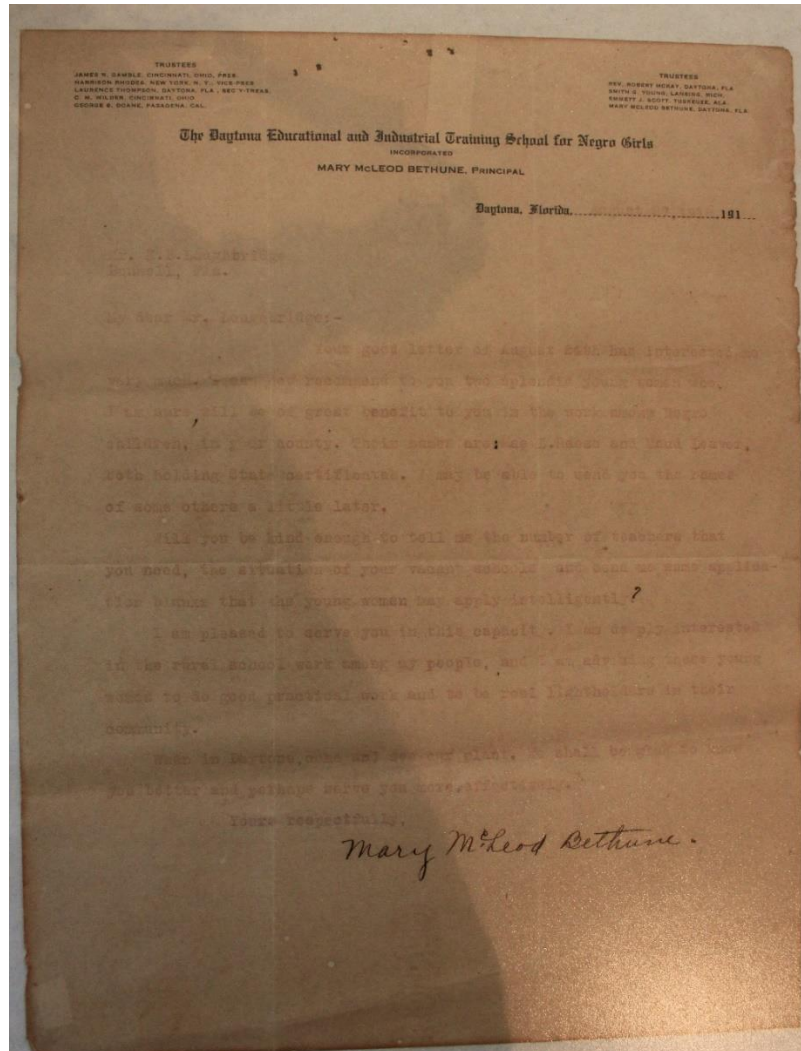


Fig. 4. Original letter from the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, Incorporated written and signed by Mary McLeod Bethune, Principal on August 27, 1918 – located in the Agriculture Vocational Building’s museum. Photograph by Author (February 2019).



Fig. 5. The Agriculture Vocational Building museum's framed photograph collage of Mary McLeod Bethune including one picture of her with a line of girls from the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls [upper right]. Photograph by Author (February 2019).



Fig. 6. Painting of Mary McLeod Bethune by Betsy Graves Reyneau.
Source: Public Domain.

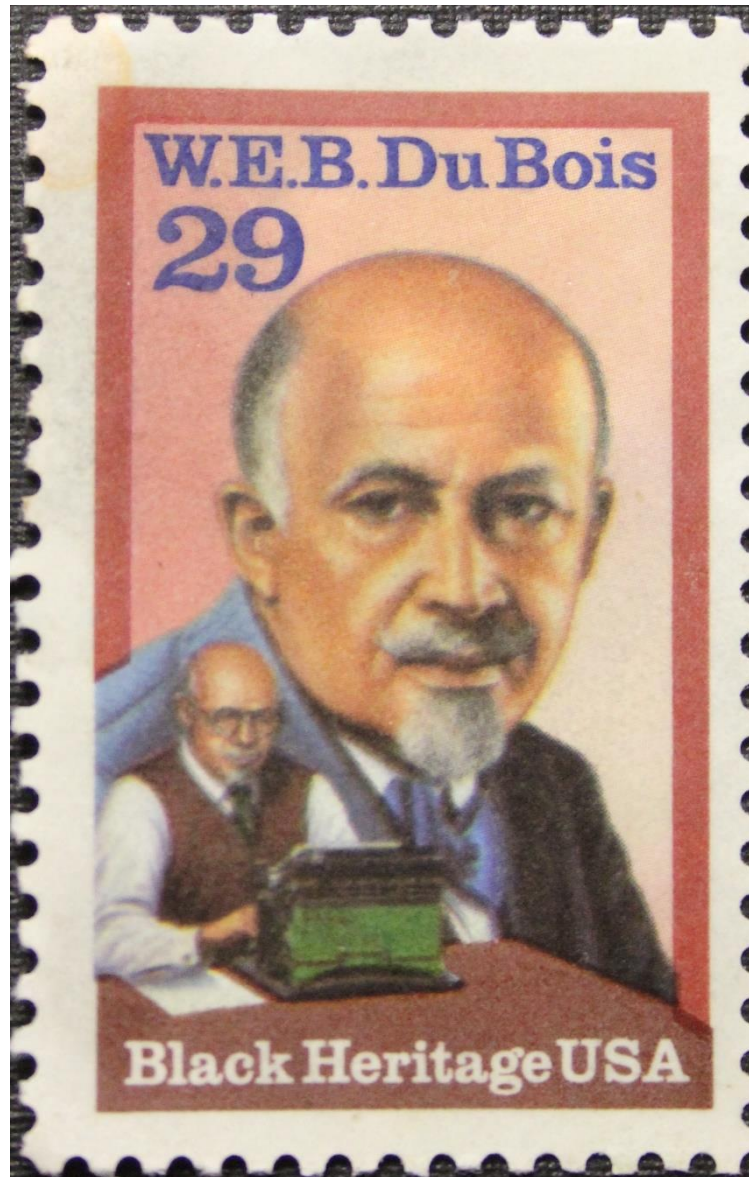


Fig. 7. W.E.B. DuBois – Black Heritage – USPS 29-cent postage stamp issued in 1992. Source: Author's Collection.



Fig. 8. The Mary McLeod Bethune Monument - Unveiled on July 10, 1974 (the anniversary of her 99th birthday). This was the first statue erected on public land in Washington, D.C. to honor an African American and a woman – it is located in Lincoln Park at East Capitol Street and 12th Street N.E., Washington, D.C. Source: Public Domain.



Fig. 9. Mary McLeod Bethune – Black Heritage – USPS 22-cent postage stamp issued in 1985. Source: Author's Collection.



Fig. 10. The Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site is located at 1318 Vermont Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. and is owned and managed by the National Park Service. Source: Public Domain.

Notes

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¹ The **Vocational Agriculture Building** was built by the Works Projects Administration (WPA) in 1938 with funding from the Flagler County Board of Public Instruction and the WPA. Interestingly, it never served as a schoolhouse as it was used as Bunnell High School's Vocational Agriculture Department and housed the local chapter of the Future Farmers of America, which is now known as the National FFA Organization. The building is also often mistaken for a one-room schoolhouse, but it actually has two large rooms and a smaller storage room. The building was dedicated as the Little Red Schoolhouse Museum on November 1, 1993, and added to the National Register of Historic Places on February 21, 2007.

² In 1918, Flagler County's population was only around 2,400 and the area was considered rural.

³ The **Barber-Scotia College** was founded in 1867 as the first historically black female institution of higher education after the American Civil War, and is located in Concord, North Carolina. It is an unaccredited historically black college and is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA).

⁴ The **Moody Bible Institute** was founded in 1886 by businessman and evangelist, Dwight Lyman Moody, as a Christian institution of higher education. Today, it is a fully accredited Bible school with campuses in Chicago, Illinois and Spokane, Washington.

⁵ The **Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls** was established in 1904 by Mary McLeod Bethune in Daytona, Florida. It started with five girls, a rented cabin and \$1.50 in cash. Fourteen years later, it grew into a twenty-acre campus with a four-story building (called Faith Hall), a two-story kitchen building and an auditorium building. Classes offered included sewing, dressmaking, domestic science, gardening, poultry raising, raffia work, rug weaving, chair caning, broom making, teaching and nursing training.

⁶ Bethune-Cookman College became a Junior College in 1931 and a four year college in 1941. In 2007, the name was changed to **Bethune-Cookman University**. Today, the school is a private, co-ed historically black university located in Daytona Beach, Florida.

⁷ The **National Council of Negro Women (NCNW)** was founded by Mary McLeod Bethune in 1935. It is a non-profit organization with the mission to advance the opportunities and the quality of life by encouraging participation in civic, political, economic and educational institutions for African American women, their families, and communities.

⁸ **Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR)** - (January 30, 1882 – April 12, 1945) served as the 32nd president of the United States from 1933 until his death in 1945. He was a member of the Democratic Party and was the only person to win four terms as president. His New Deal programs during the Great Depression created many jobs and assisted many communities during the worst economic crisis in United States history. He guided the United States towards victory during World War II, but died shortly before it ended. Although subjected to great criticism during his life and afterwards, many scholars rate him as one of the three greatest presidents in United States history.

⁹ The **Division of Negro Affairs** was a branch of the National Youth Administration, which was a federal agency that created works programs and aided black youths in finding employment and expanding their educational opportunities. Bethune's primary responsibility within the **Division of Negro Affairs** was issuing funds to pay for college for black students.

¹⁰ The Work Progress Administration (WPA) was created on May 6, 1935 by a presidential order issued by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Although Congress funded the WPA annually, it did not set it up. It was the largest and most comprehensive New Deal agency, which employed millions of people and affected almost every locality in the United States, especially rural and western mountain populations. The WPA provided jobs and income to the unemployed during the Great Depression. The program built many public buildings, projects and roads, and operated large arts,

drama, media and literacy projects. It also fed children, redistributed food, provided clothing and housing. The WPA was ended in 1943 due to the economic boom caused by World War II.

¹¹ The **Federal Council of Negro Affairs** was also referred to as the **Black Cabinet**, or **Black Brain Trust**. It was an informal organization of African Americans who served as public policy advisors to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. In 1936, Mary McLeod Bethune coined the term "Black Cabinet" and media outlets occasionally used it.

¹² The **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)** was formed in 1909 as a civil rights organization in the United States to advance justice for African Americans. Its 21st century stated mission is "to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination."

¹³ W.E.B. Du Bois (**William Edward Burghardt Du Bois**) – (1868 – 1963) was an American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, author and editor. He was the first African American to earn a doctorate degree from Harvard University. He was also one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909.

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About the Author

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by Randy Jaye

