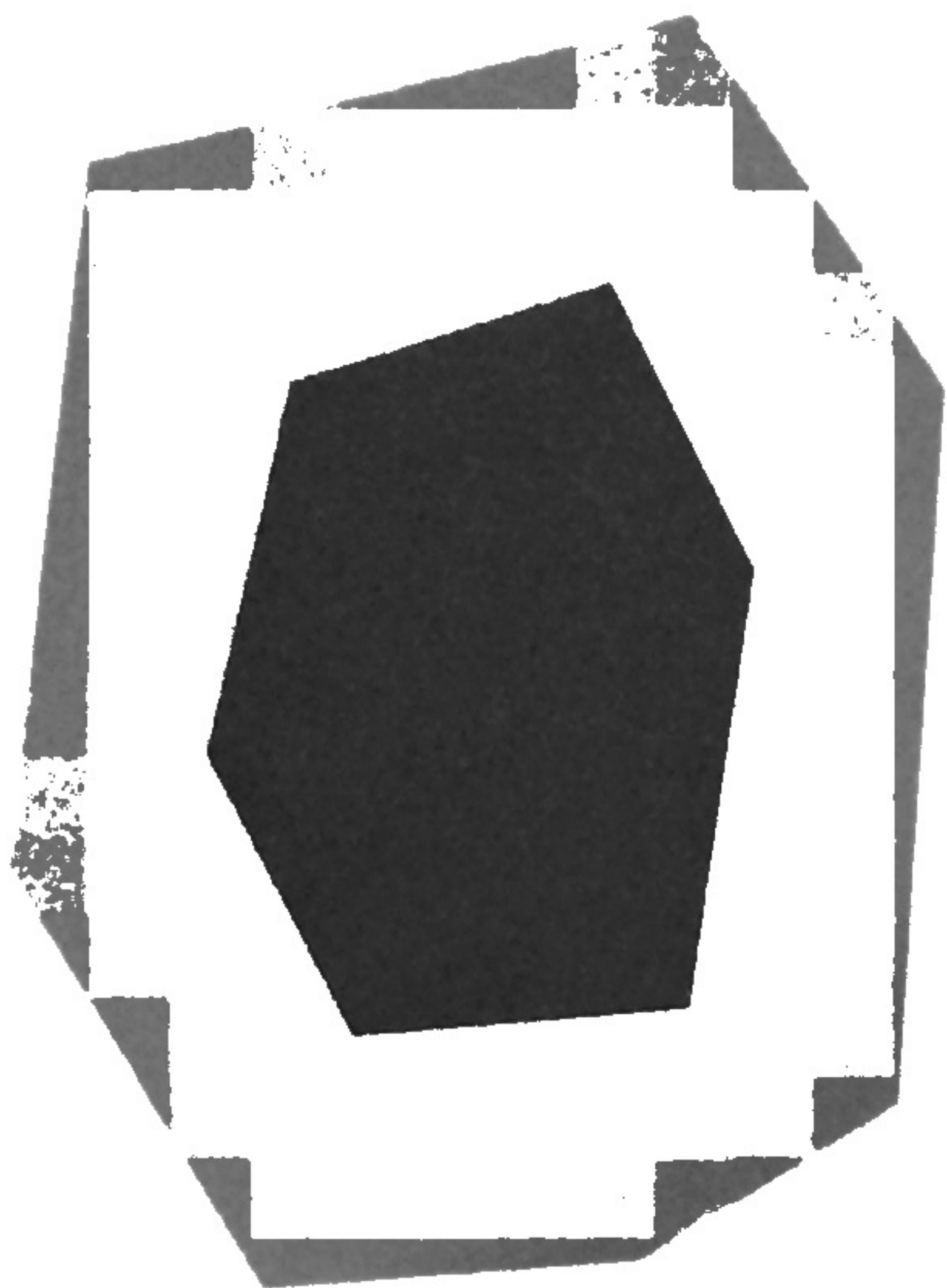


MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE

1875-1955

In 1787 the first public school for African Americans, the African Free School, opened in New York City. For the most part, however, schools for African Americans were housed in churches and homes of African-American leaders. Some abolitionists also opened schools. After the Civil War, church groups opened many schools in the South for newly freed slaves. And during Reconstruction, governments established schools. But African Americans continued to take the lead in helping to educate their

people, especially after Reconstruction ended. School systems run by whites often refused to provide money or give sufficient funding to educate African Americans. Dedicated African Americans such as Booker T. Washington, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and Mary McLeod Bethune established their own institutions to provide educational opportunities for African Americans. These tireless educators help put education at the forefront of the African-American agenda.



n October 3, 1904, I opened the doors of my school, with an enrollment of five little girls . . . whose parents paid me fifty cents' weekly tuition. . . . I considered cash money as the smallest part of my resources. I had faith in a living God, faith in myself, and a desire to serve. . . .

We burned logs and used the charred splinters as pencils, and mashed elderberries for ink. I begged strangers for a broom, a lamp, a bit of cretonne to put around the packing case which served as my desk. I haunted the city dump and the trash piles behind hotels, retrieving discarded linen and kitchenware, cracked dishes, broken chairs, pieces of old lumber. Everything was scoured and mended. This was part of the training to salvage, to reconstruct, to make bricks without straw. As parents began gradually to leave their children overnight, I had to provide sleeping accommodations. . . .

The school expanded fast. In less than two years I had 250 pupils. In desperation I hired a large hall next to my original little cottage, and used it as a combined dormitory and classroom. I concentrated more and more on girls, as I felt that they especially were hampered by lack of educational opportunities. . . .

I had many volunteer workers and few regular teachers, who were paid from fifteen to twenty-five dollars a month and board. I was supposed to keep the balance of the funds for my own pocket, but there was never any balance—only a yawning hole. I wore old clothes sent me by mission boards, recut and

redesigned for me in our dress-making classes. At last I saw that our only solution was to stop renting space, and to buy and build our own college.

Near by was a field, popularly called Hells' Hole, which was used as a dumping ground. I approached the owner, determined to buy it. The price was \$250. In a daze, he finally agreed to take five dollars down, and the balance in two years. I promised to be back in a few days with the initial payment. He never knew it, but I didn't have five dollars. I raised this sum selling ice cream and sweet-potato pies to the workmen on construction jobs, and I took the owner his money in small change wrapped in my handkerchief.

That's how the Bethune-Cookman college campus started ★

THE AUTHOR

Mary McLeod Bethune was an educator, civil rights leader, and founder of both the Bethune-Cookman College in Florida and the National Council of Negro Women. She was also an adviser to presidents and was the first African-American woman appointed to a federal administrative position. Born in Mayesville, South Carolina, Bethune became one of the most influential African Americans in the United States.

THE RESPONSE

Mary McLeod Bethune established one of the finest institutions for African-American girls, the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls. In 1923, it merged with another African-American school, resulting in Bethune-Cookman College, a leading, predominately black institution. Bethune remained as its president. During her career, Bethune championed the cause of education for African Americans. She secured scholarships and made education a possibility for thousands.