

Frederick Douglas Moore

1875-1953

*Historical Narrative written
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For a Texas Historical Commission Subject Marker Application, Denton County*

I. CONTEXT

African Americans faced numerous challenges after emancipation. The first U.S. Census including population figures for the City of Denton, occurred in 1870, recording 361 residents (329 white and 32 African American).¹

Despite obstacles, African Americans began to establish communities in the City of Denton. One of these communities that emerged near the Denton square would be called Quakertown in honor of the northern abolitionist Quakers. The small community built churches, restaurants, lodges, a physician's office, and other small businesses. The first recorded public building was the Fred Douglass School in 1878. It became the main incentive to bring people to the neighborhood by offering their children a free education. The school opened with 25 enrolled students, and by 1895, the school had 162 students.²

Around 1910, a vacancy became available at the school. With encouragement from his wife, Frederick Douglas Moore began studying and earned a teacher's certificate.³ The Fred Douglass School was located in the center of the Quakertown community, near the current Woman's Club Building. H.C. Bell served as the school's first principal and held the position until his death in 1913. J.T. McDonald replaced him, followed by Fred Moore accepting the position in 1915.⁴

In September 1913, a fire destroyed the building and forced the community to relocate

the school.⁵ Classes were held in the basement of St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church until a new building was complete in June of 1916.⁶ The new school was located in the southeast part of Denton near the current Fred Moore School.⁷

With Moore's guidance, the school continued to grow. In October 1949, a new school renamed for Fred Moore opened.⁸ Fred Moore School was opened to all grade levels with elementary through high school. Intergration of the school started with the high school students in 66-67 and then junior high in 67-68, elementary school in 68-69.⁹ Twenty-four years later, in 1992, the school reopened as the alternative school that could offer students flexibility in their education.¹⁰

Moore was honored in May 1948 with the dedication of the Fred Moore Park. He quoted a line from President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address during his acceptance speech, "Few of us will remember what was said here, but most of us will never forget what has been done here."¹¹

Frederick Douglas Moore, (1875-1953) a grandson of slaves, whose parents were illiterate, became one of the most well respected citizens in the city of Denton, Texas. His hard work and leadership helped to set many of Denton's African American youth on the path to self-improvement and successful careers.¹² Moore's career in education spanned nearly 40 years until his death in 1953.¹³

II. OVERVIEW

It was a cold and snowy day on January 1, 1875, when local physician Dr. Louisa Mansfield Owsley delivered Fredrick Douglas.¹⁴ Mrs. Owsley arrived in Denton in 1872 with her husband Dr. Henry Owsley.¹⁵

She was credited for being the first female homeopathic medicine doctor in Denton, delivering over 4,000 babies in the span of 34 years.¹⁶ It was at the suggestion of Dr. Owsley that the baby be named after the famous African American civil rights leader Frederick Douglass. Fred's mother was Mary Jane "Janie" Goodall, an African American whose parents had been slaves. When Fred was first born, she worked for a family in west Denton that allowed her to carry the baby to work with her. The job didn't pay much money, but occasionally she was paid in food and clothes for young Fred.¹⁷

Fred's father, a Native American man, disappeared six months before Fred was born. This left Janie, to raise the young child alone until she met and married Henry Lucien Moore when Fred was one year old. Henry adopted the young boy, and his name was changed to Frederick Douglas Moore.¹⁸

Before his second marriage to Janie, Henry Lucian Moore was once a servant to Sam Bass, an infamous Texas outlaw.¹⁹ Once married, Henry's traveling adventures ended and the family settled two miles south of the Owsley home, and Janie went to work for them. Henry worked various jobs that included the Davenport Mill, the brick plant, and as the first African American janitor at the North Texas State College, now known as University of North Texas.²⁰

The Moore family lived in a one-room log house with two windows. Outside the home, ducks, geese, chickens, and pigs would roam the swept yard, a landscape tradition once common in the Deep South. The grass was scraped away with a hoe, leaving the ground to be swept regularly to keep it free of grass and weeds. The hard soil would eventually become stone-like. Pear, plum, and peach trees grew in an orchard behind the house.²¹

As a child, Fred used clay to make figures of people and animals, and he mixed mud with sticks to make tiny houses. He loved to play in the yard with the neighbors. As members of the

Methodist Church, the Moore home was also a stop for circuit preachers.

Fred started school when he was seven years old. By the time he was ten, he had learned to write so well he was appointed secretary of the Sunday School at his church. He was a good student and learned to play many musical instruments. School ended for him in ninth grade.

His first job was at a bank. He later established a barbershop located under the Denton County National Bank on the southeast corner of the square. Later, he moved his shop to Oak Street, just off the square. Moore remained a barber for nine years.

He continued his musical talents by organizing a 14-piece band that played for events all over the county. He also organized a string band that would play at dances. Through time, his bands became popular, and he became known as "The Professor."

While his band was playing at a Juneteenth picnic in Lewisville, he met Sadie La'Frances who became his bride in 1902. Sadie, a well known seamstress, tailored suits, dresses, and uniforms for both local colleges in Denton along with doing sewing jobs for the local dry goods stores. When she and Fred married, Sadie made her own wedding dress for their big church wedding.

Sadie convinced Fred he should turn to education after hearing there was a vacancy at the African-American school in Denton. After passing his examination, he earned his teaching certificate.²² In 1915, he became the principal of what was then the Fred Douglass School, a four room school with only one assistant, Miss Ella Hampton.²³

He continued his education by attending Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College from 1917 to 1921. He later attended Fisk University in Tennessee and did graduate work at Columbia University in New York.²⁴

Fred Moore became a highly respected member of the Denton community. The Fred

Moore School was dedicated in 1949, named after the man who had been a mentor for Denton's students for many years. A city park was also named in his honor in 1948.²⁵

Moore's daughter, Alice Alexander, was recognized as an outstanding educator like her father. She retired from teaching after 45 years. Forty-one of those years were spent at the Fred Moore School.²⁶ Following her death, Mrs. Alexander received the same recognition as her father. In 1909, the Daughters of the Confederacy petitioned the school board to rename the central school as the Robert E. Lee School.²⁷ The name continued until 2017 when the Denton ISD school board voted unanimously to rename the school after Alice Alexander beginning with the 2018-2019 school year.²⁸ Moore had three other daughters who went on to have long careers in education, nursing, and service. Hazel Moore Young taught school in Gainesville for 19 years and another 12 years in Denton. She became the assistant director of the Fred Moore Day Nursery. Daisy Moore Punch worked for 25 years as a maid at North Texas State University's Bruce Hall. Lela Moore LaBlondell worked at the hospital for 37 years. The Moore family also had two sons and a daughter who died as children: Charles Wilburn Moore (1913-1920), Fred D. Moore Jr. (1906-1907), and Nina V. Moore (1904-1904).²⁹

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Not many men dedicate their entire life to making a difference to the lives of African-Americans in their community as Frederick Douglas Moore did. He was known for his character, integrity, and perseverance to help African-American students obtain a better education. He served his community well and is remembered for his contribution to Denton and its citizens.

On August 20, 1876, "Colored School #17" was established. There were 25 students. The first teacher was J.A. Blackburn. The name was later changed to Frederick Douglass. It was

successful for many years until September 1913, when a mysterious fire burned the school.³⁰ Classes were held at the St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church until the new school building was completed in June of 1916 in southeast Denton. The school retained the name Fred Douglass School until the late 1940's.³¹ Moore served as principal of Denton's only school for African Americans from 1915 to 1953.³²

Moore influenced generations of students with his philosophy based on the following rules of conduct:

"Exercise self-control; control tongues, thoughts, temper, and actions.

Be thrifty.

Never ridicule or defile the character of another.

Keep your self-respect, and help others to keep theirs.

Kindness; be kind in thoughts and never despise anyone.

Be kind in speech, never gossip or speak unkindly of others.

Good health is important. Keep yourself clean in body and mind.

Be self-reliant, but listen to the advice of wiser and older people.

Develop independence and wisdom.

Act according to what seems right and fair.

Never fear being laughed at for doing what is right.

Be brave. A coward does not make a good citizen.

Always play fair. Never cheat.

Always treat your opponents with courtesy."³³

On October 8, 1947, Denton voted to build the Fred Moore Negro School.³⁴ Two years later, the new school, located at the intersection of Mill and Hill Street in Denton was officially dedicated on October 2, 1949. The new school contained a library, combination gym, auditorium, manual training shop, and a large homemaking department. The school's enrollment that year was 366 students. All but the first three grades were housed in the new building. Those three grades were located in a building beside the new school. Moore explained, "the building was far superior in quality to any Negro school in Dallas."³⁵ At the dedication, Moore received the Man of the Year Award from the Applause Magazine. He said, "I'm happier than the President of the United States."³⁶

In the late 1940's, Moore, along with his daughter Alice Moore Alexander, were instrumental in starting the first Negro scouting troops for the youth in Denton. Fred served as committee chairman of Denton's first "colored" Boy Scout troop, while Alice, the first grade teacher at Fred Moore School, became a troop leader.^{37, 38}

In 1947, the citizens had the privilege of selecting the name of a new park.³⁹ When the results were tallied, Fred Moore had received the largest number of votes. The new park was named "Fred Moore Park." At the dedication, Moore used the words of President Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address, "Few of us will remember what was said here, but most of us will never forget what was done here." This dedication was an act of benevolence and friendly relationship between the white and black citizens of Denton.⁴⁰

Moore also worked to get the cemetery space in southeast Denton known as the Oakwood Cemetery. With the help of Luther Lambert, Arthur Cockran, Jack Allen, and George Whitten, Moore raised \$70.00. He carried the money to the City Council and requested the land for the

Negro Cemetery be located on East Prairie Street. The council accepted the money, and donated the land for Moore's efforts.⁴¹

A campaign launched by Fred Moore in July 1953, helped raise funds to pave the section of Prairie Street located in Denton's black district. According to Moore, "if the colored districts have paved streets it will benefit everyone in Denton."⁴²

The Soroptimist Club and the Business and Professional Women's Club took the lead by starting a day nursery for African American children of working mothers. The nursery opened on July 19, 1955, in the Community Building of Fred Moore Park. These organizations saw the need for a nursery after three young children burned to death while their parents were at work.⁴³ The center began with one volunteer, Fred Moore's daughter Hazel Moore Young, who cared for ten children the first year. The nursery was eventually given the name Fred Moore Day Nursery School.⁴⁴

On September 30, 1953, *Denton Record Chronicle* reported the death of Fred Moore on the front page of the paper. The article stated "Denton had lost one of its most valuable assets, as he was one of the most influential citizens Denton boasted. He was a real gentleman of the Old South, and his influence with his people as well as his white friends was great. He was listened to by the people of Denton and his advice was often sought by his friends of both races."⁴⁵

Before the integration of all high school students into Denton High School in the late 1960's, the measure of inequality between the two high school principals was seen in the 1940 Denton County census. The census that year recorded the amount of wages or salary earned for each person. Wages for Fred Moore, principle of Fred Moore High School since 1915, were listed as \$950.00.⁴⁶ Wages for Amos O. Calhoun, principal of Denton High School since 1919,⁴⁷ were listed as \$3,000.00.⁴⁸ Both men had attended Columbia University, so the amount of

education should not have been a determining factor in their salaries.^{49, 50}

Fred Moore did not live long enough to see the integration in schools. The Denton School Board decided on June 29, 1967, to close the Fred Moore High School in September of that year and to phase out the Fred Moore Junior High in 1968. Their reasoning was it was not economical to try and build a good high school for only 112 students. The action also was taken in compliance with the Civil Rights Act.⁵¹

Bill Rives wrote an article in the *Denton Record Chronicle* about Fred Moore in 1968, the same year the Fred Moore School closed. Although Rives had never met Fred Moore, he wished he had. He said "I wished there were more Fred Moores in the world. If there were, it would be a better place." Fred Moore was a modest African-American citizen of Denton. In his later years, his family and friends urged him to write a book. Moore said he would like to, but the trouble was he hadn't done enough. That's what he thought, but others didn't agree. Fred Moore had some marvelous rules for building character. He said, for example, "Good Americans control themselves. [those] who best control themselves can best serve their country." Keep your self-respect, and help others to keep theirs. Sadie Moore, Fred's wife, said, "he had said so many times that Denton was the finest city for getting along well in the United States," that the close relationship between the races would be enjoyed and appreciated, and that "there can't be a better place in which to live and grow than Denton."⁵²

IV. DOCUMENTATION

¹ U.S. Census (1870), Denton County Texas.

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- ⁶ "Quakertown" Narrative, p.2.
- ⁷ "Names of schools honor men of the South." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 4 July 1976, p.97. Web. 27 March 2018.
- ⁸ "Open House This Afternoon To Dedicate Fred Moore School." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 02 October 1949, p.17A. Web. 27 March 2018.
- ⁹ "Plan for Desegregation Outlined." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 23 April 1969.
- ¹⁰ Fred Moore High School, About Our School, <http://www.dentonisd.org/domain/5864>
- ¹¹ "Fred D. Moore Park Dedicated." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 2 May 1948, p.7. Web. 27 March 2018.
- ¹² "Black History: Its focus centers on three things, the school, churches and Fred Moore." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 04 July 1976, p.46. Web. 11 January 2018.
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- ¹⁷ Cochran, Mike, *Fred Moore: An African-American Leader in Denton*, Web. 27 March 2018 <http://www.dentonhistory.net/page32/page1/>
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- ¹⁹ Moore, p.13.

²⁰ Moore, p.15.

²¹ Moore, p.19.

²² Keith Shelton, "Yesteryear: Denton's African-American community owes much to Fred Moore." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 17 February 2018, Web. 20 March 2018.

<http://www.dentonrc.com/news/news/2018/02/17/yesteryear-dentons-african-american-community-owes-much-fred-moore>

²³ Moore, p.24.

²⁴ Moore, p.22.

²⁵ *Denton Record Chronicle*, 1948, p.7.

²⁶ *Denton Record Chronicle*, 1976, p.46.

²⁷ Bridges, 1978, p.265.

²⁸ Trustees Approve the Names for Two Elementary Schools, Web. Accessed 28 March 2018

<http://www.dentonisd.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=1&ModuleInstanceID=15910&ViewID=6446EE88-D30C-497E-9316-3F8874B3E108&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=140976&PageID=1>

²⁹ *Denton Record Chronicle*, 1976, p.46.

³⁰ Quakertown, City of Denton, Denton County, Texas, Colored Public Free School. p.72.

Records on file at Denton County Office of History and Culture Reference Room Courthouse on the Square

³¹ "Quakertown" Narrative, p.2.

³² "Fred Moore Happy As If He Were U.S. President." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 02 October 1949, p.17B. Web. 16 March 2018.

³³ Cochran, p.1.

³⁴ "Public Schools Established In 1882." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 02 August 1953, p.63. Web. 15 March 2018.

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⁴³ "Nursery For Working Mothers To Open In Fred Moore Park." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 17 July 1955, p.12. Web. 29 March 2018.

⁴⁴ Fred Moore Day Nursery, About Our Nursery. Web. 29 March 2018
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⁴⁵ R.J. Edwards, "Round About Town." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 30 September 1953, p.1. Web. 18 March 2018.

⁴⁶ "United States Census, 1940," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KWJY-MWD> : accessed 1 April 2018), Fred Moore, Denton, Justice Precinct 1, Denton, Texas, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) 61-5, sheet 63A, line 30, family 484, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, NARA digital publication T627. Records of the Bureau of the Census, 1790 - 2007, RG 29. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2012, roll 4020.

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⁴⁹ "Denton Senior High School" by Nita Thurman, Historical Narrative written in 1980, p.4. Texas Historical Commission Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, #5507015689

⁵⁰ Moore, p.24.

⁵¹ "Denton Area News Of The Week In Review." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 02 July 1967, p.5. Web. 15 March 2018.

⁵² "Views by Bill Rives," *Denton Record Chronicle*, 5 January 1968, p.1-2