

= Mary McLeod Bethune =

Mary Jane McLeod Bethune (born Mary Jane McLeod ; July 10 , 1875 ? May 18 , 1955) was an American educator , stateswoman , philanthropist , humanitarian and civil rights activist best known for starting a private school for African @-@ American students in Daytona Beach , Florida . She attracted donations of time and money , and developed the academic school as a college . It later continued to develop as Bethune @-@ Cookman University . She also was appointed as a national adviser to President Franklin D. Roosevelt as part of what was known as his Black Cabinet . She was known as " The First Lady of The Struggle " because of her commitment to gain better lives for African Americans .

Born in Mayesville , South Carolina , to parents who had been slaves , she started working in fields with her family at age five . She took an early interest in becoming educated ; with the help of benefactors , Bethune attended college hoping to become a missionary in Africa . She started a school for African @-@ American girls in Daytona Beach , Florida . It later merged with a private institute for African @-@ American boys , and was known as the Bethune @-@ Cookman School . Bethune maintained high standards and promoted the school with tourists and donors , to demonstrate what educated African Americans could do . She was president of the college from 1923 to 1942 , and 1946 to 1947 . She was one of the few women in the world to serve as a college president at that time .

Bethune was also active in women 's clubs , which were strong civic organizations supporting welfare and other needs , and became a national leader . After working on the presidential campaign for Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 , she was invited as a member of his Black Cabinet . She advised him on concerns of black people and helped share Roosevelt 's message and achievements with blacks , who had historically been Republican voters since the Civil War . At the time , blacks had been largely disenfranchised in the South since the turn of the century , so she was speaking to black voters across the North . Upon her death , columnist Louis E. Martin said , " She gave out faith and hope as if they were pills and she some sort of doctor . "

Honors include designation of her home in Daytona Beach as a National Historic Landmark , her house in Washington , D.C. as a National Historic Site , and the installation of a sculpture of her in Lincoln Park in Washington , D.C.

= = Early life and education = =

Mary Jane McLeod was born in 1875 in a small log cabin near Mayesville , South Carolina , on a rice and cotton farm in Sumter County . She was the fifteenth of seventeen children born to Sam and Patsy (McIntosh) McLeod , both former slaves . Most of her siblings had been born into slavery . Her mother worked for her former master , and her father farmed cotton near a large house they called " The Homestead . "

Her parents wanted to be independent so had sacrificed to buy a farm for the family . As a child , Mary would accompany her mother to deliver " white people ? s " wash . Allowed to go into the white children ? s nursery , Mary became fascinated with their toys . One day she picked up a book and as she opened it , a white child took it away from her , saying she didn ? t know how to read . Mary decided then that the only difference between white and colored people was the ability to read and write . She was inspired to learn .

McLeod attended Mayesville 's one @-@ room black schoolhouse , Trinity Mission School , which was run by the Presbyterian Board of Missions of Freedmen . She was the only child in her family to attend school , so each day , she taught her family what she had learned . To get to and from school , Mary walked five miles each day . Her teacher Emma Jane Wilson became a significant mentor in her life . Wilson had attended Scotia Seminary (now Barber @-@ Scotia College) . She helped McLeod attend the same school on a scholarship , which she did from 1888 ? 1893 . The following year , she attended Dwight L. Moody 's Institute for Home and Foreign Missions in Chicago (now the Moody Bible Institute) , hoping to become a missionary in Africa . Told that black missionaries were not needed , she planned to teach , as education was a prime goal among African Americans .

= = Marriage and family = =

McLeod married Albertus Bethune in 1898 , and they lived for a year in Savannah , Georgia , where she did social work . They had a son Albert together . Coyden Harold Uggams , a visiting Presbyterian minister , persuaded the couple to relocate to Palatka , Florida , to run a mission school . The Bethunes moved in 1899 ; Mary ran the mission school and began an outreach to prisoners . Albertus left the family in 1907 ; he never got a divorce but relocated to South Carolina . He died in 1918 from tuberculosis .

= = Teaching career = =

= = = Foundations with Lucy Craft Laney = = =

Bethune worked as a teacher briefly at her former elementary school in Sumter County . In 1896 , she began teaching at Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augusta , Georgia , which was part of a Presbyterian mission organized by northern congregations . It was founded and run by Lucy Craft Laney . As the daughter of former slaves , Laney ran her school with a Christian missionary zeal , emphasizing character and practical education for girls . She also accepted the boys who showed up eager to learn . Laney 's mission was to imbue Christian moral education in her students to arm them for their life challenges . Of her year at Laney 's school , Bethune said ,

" I was so impressed with her fearlessness , her amazing touch in every respect , an energy that seemed inexhaustible and her mighty power to command respect and admiration from her students and all who knew her . She handled her domain with the art of a master . "

Bethune adopted many of Laney 's educational philosophies , including her emphasis on educating girls and women to improve the conditions of black people : " I believe that the greatest hope for the development of my race lies in training our women thoroughly and practically . " (This is a strategy being followed by organizers in numerous developing countries . Educating women raises the lives of families as a whole .) After one year at Haines , Bethune was transferred by the Presbyterian mission to the Kindell Institute in Sumter , South Carolina , where she had met her current husband .

= = = School in Daytona = = =

After her marriage and move to Florida , Bethune became determined to start a school for girls . Bethune moved from Palatka to Daytona because it had more economic opportunity ; it had become a popular tourist destination and businesses were thriving . In October 1904 , she rented a small house for \$ 11 @. @ 00 per month . She made benches and desks from discarded crates , and acquired other items through charity . Bethune used \$ 1 @. @ 50 to start the Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls . She initially had six students ? five girls aged six to twelve , and her son Albert . The school bordered Daytona 's dump . Bethune , parents of students , and church members raised money by making sweet potato pies , ice cream , and fried fish , and selling them to crews at the dump .

In the early days , the students made ink for pens from elderberry juice , and pencils from burned wood ; they asked local businesses for furniture . Bethune wrote later , " I considered cash money as the smallest part of my resources . I had faith in a loving God , faith in myself , and a desire to serve . " The school received donations of money , equipment , and labor from local black churches . Within a year , Bethune was teaching more than 30 girls at the school .

Bethune also courted wealthy white organizations , such as the ladies ' Palmetto Club . She invited influential white men to sit on her school board of trustees , gaining participation by James Gamble (of Procter & Gamble) and Thomas H. White (of White Sewing Machines) . When Booker T.

Washington of Tuskegee Institute visited in 1912 , he advised her of the importance of gaining support by white benefactors for funding . Bethune had met with Washington in 1896 and was impressed by his clout with his donors .

The rigorous curriculum had the girls rise at 5 : 30 a.m. for Bible study . The classes in home economics and industrial skills such as dressmaking , millinery , cooking , and other crafts emphasized a life of self @-@ sufficiency for them as women . Students ' days ended at 9 pm . Soon Bethune added science and business courses , then high school @-@ level courses of math , English , and foreign languages . Bethune was always seeking donations to keep her school operating ; as she traveled , she was fundraising . A donation of \$ 62 @,@ 000 by John D. Rockefeller helped , as did her friendship with Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife , beginning in the 1930s , who gave her entree to a progressive network .

In 1931 , the Methodist Church helped the merger of her school with the boys ' Cookman Institute , forming the Bethune @-@ Cookman College , a coeducational junior college . Bethune became president . Through the Great Depression , Bethune @-@ Cookman School continued to operate , and met the educational standards of the State of Florida . From 1936 to 1942 , Bethune had to cut back her time as president because of her duties in Washington , DC . Funding declined during this period of her absence . But , by 1941 the college had developed a four @-@ year curriculum and achieved full college status . By 1942 Bethune gave up the presidency , as her health was being adversely affected by her many responsibilities .

= = Career as a public leader = =

= = = National Association of Colored Women = = =

In 1896 , the National Association of Colored Women was formed to promote the needs of black women . Bethune served as the Florida chapter president of the NACW from 1917 to 1925 . She worked to register black voters , which was resisted by white society and had been made almost impossible by a variety of obstacles in Florida law and practices controlled by white administrators . She was threatened by members of the resurgent Ku Klux Klan in those years . Bethune also served as the president of the Southeastern Federation of Colored Women 's Clubs from 1920 to 1925 , which worked to improve opportunities for black women .

She was elected as national president of the NACW in 1924 . While the organization struggled to raise funds for regular operations , Bethune envisioned its acquiring a headquarters and hiring a professional executive secretary ; she implemented this when NACW bought a property at 1318 Vermont Avenue in Washington , DC . She led it to be the first black @-@ controlled organization with headquarters in the capital .

Gaining a national reputation , in 1928 Bethune was invited to attend the Child Welfare Conference called by Republican President Calvin Coolidge . In 1930 President Herbert Hoover appointed her to the White House Conference on Child Health .

= = = Southeastern Association of Colored Women 's Clubs = = =

The Southeastern Federation of Colored Women ? s Clubs (eventually renamed as the Southeastern Association of Colored Women ? s Clubs) elected Bethune as president after its first conference in 1920 at the Tuskegee Institute . They intended to reach out to Southern Women (specifically white women) for support and unity in gaining rights for black women . The women met in Memphis , Tennessee to discuss interracial problems . In many respects , all of the women agreed about what needed to be changed , until they came to the topic of suffrage . The white women at the conference tried to strike down a resolution on black suffrage . The SACWC responded by issuing a pamphlet entitled Southern Negro Women and Race Co @-@ Operation ; it delineated their demands regarding conditions in domestic service , child welfare , conditions of travel , education , lynching , the public press , and voting rights . The group went on to help register

black women to vote after they were granted suffrage a few months later after passage of the constitutional amendment . Within the state , however , and in other southern states , black men and women were largely disenfranchised by discriminatory application of literacy and comprehension tests , as well as requirements to pay poll taxes , lengthy residency requirements , and the need to keep and display records .

= = = National Council of Negro Women = = =

In 1935 Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women in New York City , bringing together representatives of 28 different organizations to work to improve the lives of black women and their communities . Bethune said of the council :

" It is our pledge to make a lasting contribution to all that is finest and best in America , to cherish and enrich her heritage of freedom and progress by working for the integration of all her people regardless of race , creed , or national origin , into her spiritual , social , cultural , civic , and economic life , and thus aid her to achieve the glorious destiny of a true and unfettered democracy . "

In 1938 , the NCNW hosted the White House Conference on Negro Women and Children , demonstrating the importance of black women in democratic roles . During World War II , the NCNW gained approval for black women to be commissioned as officers in the Women 's Army Corps . Bethune also served as a political appointee and the Special Assistant to the Secretary of War during the war .

In the 1990s , the headquarters for the National Council for Negro Women moved to Pennsylvania Avenue , centrally located between the White House and the U.S. Capitol . The former headquarters , where Bethune also lived at one time , has been designated as a National Historic Site .

= = = National Youth Administration = = =

The National Youth Administration (NYA) was a federal agency created under Roosevelt 's Works Progress Administration (WPA) . It provided programs specifically to promote relief and employment for young people . It focused on unemployed citizens aged sixteen to twenty @-@ five years who were not in school . Bethune lobbied the organization so aggressively and effectively for minority involvement that she earned a full @-@ time staff position in 1936 as an assistant .

Within two years , Bethune was appointed to position of Director of the Division of Negro Affairs , and as such , became the first African @-@ American female division head . She managed NYA funds to help black students through school @-@ based programs . She was the only black agent of the NYA who was a financial manager . She ensured black colleges participation in the Civilian Pilot Training Program , which graduated some of the first black pilots . The director of the NYA said in 1939 : " No one can do what Mrs. Bethune can do . "

Bethune 's determination helped national officials recognize the need to improve employment for black youth . The NYA 's final report , issued in 1943 , stated ,

" more than 300 @, @ 000 black young men and women were given employment and work training on NYA projects . These projects opened to these youth , training opportunities and enabled the majority of them to qualify for jobs heretofore closed to them . "

Within the administration , Bethune advocated for the appointment of black NYA officials to positions of political power . Bethune 's administrative assistants served as liaisons between the National Division of Negro Affairs and the NYA agencies on the state and local levels . The high number of administrative assistants composed a work force commanded by Bethune . They helped gain better job and salary opportunities for blacks across the country . During her tenure , Bethune also pushed federal officials to approve a program of consumer education for blacks , and a foundation for black crippled children . She planned for studies for black workers ' education councils . National officials did not support these due to inadequate funding and fear of duplicating the work of private non @-@ governmental agencies . The NYA was terminated in 1943 .

= = = Black Cabinet = = =

Bethune became a close and loyal friend of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt . At the Southern Conference on Human Welfare in 1938 , held in Birmingham , Alabama , Eleanor Roosevelt requested a seat next to Bethune despite state segregation laws . Roosevelt frequently referred to Bethune as " her closest friend in her age group . " Bethune told black voters about the work being done on their behalf by the Roosevelt Administration , and made their concerns known to the Roosevelts . She had unprecedented access to the White House through her relationship with the First Lady .

She used her access to form a coalition of leaders from black organizations called the Federal Council of Negro Affairs , but which came to be known as the Black Cabinet . It served as an advisory board to the Roosevelt administration on issues facing black people in America . It was composed of numerous talented blacks , mostly men , who had been appointed to positions in federal agencies . This was the first collective of black people working in higher positions in government . It showed voters that the Roosevelt administration cared about black concerns . The group gathered in Bethune 's office or apartment and met informally , rarely keeping minutes . Although as advisers they did not directly create public policy , they were a respected leadership among black voters ; they influenced political appointments and disbursement of funds to organizations that would benefit black people .

= = = Civil Rights = = =

In 1931 the Methodist Church supported merging of the Daytona Normal and Industrial School and the Cookman College for Men into Bethune @-@ Cookman College , established first as a junior college . Bethune became a member of the church but it was segregated in the South . Essentially two organizations operated in the Methodist denomination . Bethune was prominent in the primarily black Florida Conference . While she worked to integrate the mostly white Methodist Episcopal Church , South , she protested its initial plans for integration because they proposed separate jurisdictions based on race .

Bethune worked to educate both whites and blacks about the accomplishments and needs of black people , writing in 1938 @,@

" If our people are to fight their way up out of bondage we must arm them with the sword and the shield and buckler of pride ? belief in themselves and their possibilities , based upon a sure knowledge of the achievements of the past . " A year later she wrote , " Not only the Negro child but children of all races should read and know of the achievements , accomplishments and deeds of the Negro . World peace and brotherhood are based on a common understanding of the contributions and cultures of all races and creeds . "

On Sundays she opened her school to tourists in Daytona Beach , showing off her students ' accomplishments , hosting national speakers on black issues , and taking donations . She ensured that these Community Meetings were integrated . A black who was a teenager in Daytona at the turn of the 20th century later recalled : " Many tourists attended , sitting wherever there were empty seats . There was no special section for white people . "

When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education (1954) that segregation of public schools was unconstitutional , Bethune defended the decision by writing in the Chicago Defender that year :

There can be no divided democracy , no class government , no half @-@ free county , under the constitution . Therefore , there can be no discrimination , no segregation , no separation of some citizens from the rights which belong to all We are on our way . But these are frontiers which we must conquer We must gain full equality in education ... in the franchise ... in economic opportunity , and full equality in the abundance of life .

Bethune organized the first officer candidate schools for black women . She lobbied federal officials , including Roosevelt , on behalf of African @-@ American women who wanted to join the military .

= = Death and accolades = =

On May 18 , 1955 , Bethune died of a heart attack . Her death was followed by editorial tributes in African @-@ American newspapers across the United States . The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch stated she was , " Exhibit No. 1 for all who have faith in America and the democratic process . " The Atlanta Daily World said her life was , " One of the most dramatic careers ever enacted at any time upon the stage of human activity . " And the Pittsburgh Courier wrote , " In any race or nation she would have been an outstanding personality and made a noteworthy contribution because her chief attribute was her indomitable soul . "

The mainstream press praised her as well . Christian Century suggested , " the story of her life should be taught to every school child for generations to come . " The New York Times noted she was , " one of the most potent factors in the growth of interracial goodwill in America . " The Washington Post said : " So great were her dynamism and force that it was almost impossible to resist her ... Not only her own people , but all America has been enriched and ennobled by her courageous , ebullient spirit . " Her hometown newspaper , the Daytona Beach Evening News printed , " To some she seemed unreal , something that could not be What right had she to greatness ? ... The lesson of Mrs. Bethune 's life is that genius knows no racial barriers . "

= = Honors = =

In 1930 , journalist Ida Tarbell included Bethune as number 10 on her list of America 's greatest women . Bethune was awarded the Spingarn Medal in 1935 by the NAACP .

Mary McLeod Bethune was the only black woman present at the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945 , representing the NAACP with W. E. B. Du Bois and Walter White . In 1949 she became the first woman to receive the National Order of Honour and Merit , Haiti 's highest award . She served as the US emissary to the induction of President William V.S. Tubman of Liberia in 1949 .

She also served as an adviser to five of the Presidents of the United States . Calvin Coolidge and Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her to several government positions which included : Special Advisor in Minority Affairs , director of the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration , and chair of Federal Council of Negro Affairs . Among her honors , she was an assistant director of the Women 's Army Corps . She was also an honorary member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority .

= = Personal life = =

Bethune was described as " ebony " in complexion . She carried a cane , not for support but for effect . She said it gave her " swank " . She was a teetotaler and preached temperance for African Americans , taking opportunities to chastise drunken blacks she encountered in public . Bethune said more than once that the school and the students in Daytona were her first family , and that her son and extended family came second . Her students often referred to her as " Mama Bethune . "

She was noted for achieving her goals . Dr. Robert Weaver , who also served in Roosevelt 's Black Cabinet , said of her , " She had the most marvelous gift of effecting feminine helplessness in order to attain her aims with masculine ruthlessness . " But when a white Daytona resident threatened Bethune 's students with a rifle , Bethune worked to make an ally of him . The director of the McLeod Hospital recalled , " Mrs. Bethune treated him with courtesy and developed such goodwill in him that we found him protecting the children and going so far as to say , ' If anybody bothers old Mary , I will protect her with my life . ' "

Self @-@ sufficiency was a high priority throughout her life . Bethune invested in several businesses , including the Pittsburgh Courier , a black newspaper , and several life insurance companies . She founded Central Life Insurance of Florida . She eventually retired in Florida . Due to state segregation , blacks were not allowed to visit the beach . Bethune and several other business owners invested in Paradise Beach : they purchased a 2 @-@ mile (3 @.@ 2 km) stretch

of beach and the surrounding properties , selling these to black families . They did allow white families to visit the waterfront . Paradise Beach was later renamed as Bethune @-@ Volusia Beach in her honor . She also was a one @-@ fourth owner of the Welricha Motel in Daytona .

= = Legacy and honors = =

In 1973 , Mary McLeod Bethune was inducted into the National Women 's Hall of Fame . On July 10 , 1974 , the anniversary of her 99th birthday , the Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial , by artist Robert Berks , was erected in her honor in Lincoln Park (Washington , D.C.) The funds for the monument were raised by the National Council of Negro Women . It was the first monument honoring an African American or a woman to be installed in a public park in the District of Columbia . The inscription on the pedestal reads " let her works praise her , " while the side is engraved with a passage from her " Last Will and Testament " :

I leave you love . I leave you hope . I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another . I leave you a thirst for education . I leave you a respect for the use of power . I leave you faith . I leave you racial dignity . I leave you a desire to live harmoniously with your fellow men . I leave you a responsibility to our young people .

Approximately 250 @,@ 000 people attended the unveiling ceremony , including Shirley Chisholm , the first African @-@ American woman elected to Congress .

In 1985 the US Postal Service issued a stamp in Bethune 's honor . In 1989 Ebony Magazine listed her as one of " 50 Most Important Figures in Black US History . " In 1999 , Ebony Magazine included her as one of the " 100 Most Fascinating Black Women of the 20th century . "

In 1991 , the International Astronomical Union named the Bethune Patera on planet Venus in her honor .

In 1994 , the National Park Service acquired Bethune 's last residence , the NACW Council House at 1318 Vermont Avenue . The former headquarters was designated as the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site . The NACW is now located on Pennsylvania Avenue .

Schools have been named in her honor in Los Angeles , Chicago , San Diego , Dallas , Palm Beach , Florida , Moreno Valley , California , Minneapolis , Ft . Lauderdale , Atlanta , Philadelphia , Folkston and College Park , Georgia , New Orleans , Rochester , New York , Cleveland , South Boston , Virginia , Jacksonville , Florida , and Milwaukee , Wisconsin .

In 2002 , scholar Molefi Kete Asante listed Mary McLeod Bethune on his list of 100 Greatest African Americans .

In 2004 , Bethune @-@ Cookman University celebrated its hundredth anniversary from its founding as a primary school . It has a 82 @.@ 2 acres (333 @,@ 000 m2) campus in Daytona Beach and 40 buildings . The former 2nd Avenue on one side of the university was renamed as Mary McLeod Bethune Boulevard . The university offers 35 majors in six major colleges . The university 's website says , " the vision of the founder remains in full view over one @-@ hundred years later . The institution prevails in order that others might improve their heads , hearts , and hands . " The university 's vice president recalled her legacy : " During Mrs. Bethune 's time , this was the only place in the city of Daytona Beach where Whites and Blacks could sit in the same room and enjoy what she called ' gems from students ' ? their recitations and songs . This is a person who was able to bring Black people and White together . "

An historical marker in Mayesville , Sumter County , South Carolina , commemorates her birthplace .