

Mary McLeod Bethune School

Mary McLeod Bethune for whom this Fresno school was named, was a native of South Carolina. She was born in 1875 to former slave parents. They owned a small farm and were deeply religious people.

Her parents taught her faith in herself and the importance of education but, she struggled to achieve adequate schooling. Ms. Bethune earned a scholarship to Scotia Seminary in North Carolina where she attended Scotia seven years. She next enrolled in the Moody Bible Institute in Illinois as she aspired to become a missionary in Africa. This goal was not achieved as she was considered to be too young for such a post. Subsequently she went to Florida and became a school teacher.

In 1904, this determined young lady sought and received financial help from John D. Rockefeller and established the Daytona Educational and Industrial Institute in Daytona. She was not only the founder but the long-term Principal of this school. From that headquarters she gradually established a chain of such mission schools for promising young black youth. Using funds acquired as a result of tour concerts of girl singing groups from her school, Ms. Bethune also established and supported the McLeod Hospital in Daytona.

In 1923, Ms. Bethune led a plan to combine her educational institution with a men's college named the Daytona-Cookman Collegiate Institute. The combined institution was renamed Bethune-Cookman College and with Methodist church support and help it grew and prospered. Ms. Bethune was also active in National Educational Movements under Presidents Hoover and F. D. Roosevelt. She received many awards and honors.

Mary McLeod Bethune was the Advisor of Minority Affairs to President F. D. Roosevelt. She lived and stayed active until 1955.

This school named in her honor was first listed in the Fresno Unified School District directory in 1972-73. It is located at 1616 South Fruit.

Photo of Ms. Mary McLeod Bethune, approx. 1905 (World Digital Lib.)



Photo of Bethune Elementary approx. 1980

