

**Bethune Elementary School unknown – 1957**

**School Drive**

**Immokalee, Florida**

**Bethune High School 1957 – 1967**

**Immokalee, Florida**

Bethune Elementary Currently, there is no written history that Bethune Elementary/Junior High School existed in Immokalee, Florida (Unknown - 1956 – first – eight grade)

Bethune High School 1957 -1968 first through twelfth grade)

Collier County Public Schools for African American Children

Immokalee, Florida

Compiled by Bennie Perdue

Bethune High School

Class of 1965

### **Introduction**

Collier County has maintained public schools for African American children since 1927. In June 1927 attention was called to twelve Negro children who needed a school. In June of the same year the Negroes opened their own church built for them by Barron Collier. The small Negro congregation had formerly met in the Negro mess hall. Barron Collier, F. Irvin Holmes and D. Graham Copeland attended the dedication services at which it was announced that the pastor, the Reverend Hamilton, would open a school for Negroes in the fall.(Tebeau, 1966, p.132). The school was called DuPont School for Negro Children in the Everglades area through eighth grade. (Tebeau, 1966, p.132).

From a historical perspective, at first glance, it appears that many of Bethune School teachers first taught a DuPont Elementary School may have started their teaching careers in Everglades City. According to contributors to this project, many of the teachers that taught at old Bethune Elementary School between, 1953 to 1957, may have transferred from DuPont Elementary school in Everglades to Bethune Elementary School in Immokalee. Throughout this period, children that completed the eighth grade at Dupont and Bethune Schools were transported to Dunbar High School in Fort Myers, Florida. Mrs. Annie Lucille (Rubin) Brown one of the contributors to this project was transported by bus from the Everglades area to Dunbar High School in Fort Myers, Florida. At some point, around 1957, children from Naples were transported to Bethune High School, Immokalee, Florida.

There were some strong ties between the children that were transported to Bethune school from the, so called trail, and Immokalee. I think we may have developed so many similarities in our attitude, behavior, and approach to life as we developed understanding of our responsibilities for self. It is an unexplainable intangible value that were shared in school that has guided our belief and provided some directions in our lives.

### **THE EARLY YEARS OF BETHUNE ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL**

**Immokalee, Florida**

The origin of Bethune Elementary School cannot be determined from recorded history of Collier County public schools for African American students in Immokalee, Florida. However, in a conversation with

Mrs. Florenzella Fuller, an early resident of Immokalee, still resides in Collier County today, stated, "Immokalee Elementary was the original name of Bethune Elementary School". According to Mr. Harold Clark, Principal of Bethune High School, schools for African American children historically were named after the city, county, or state. As social change toward the education of African American children in America changed in a more positive direction, schools were named after African American heroes, educators, and other national figures that made major historic contributions to society. Considering these facts, it is possible then that old Bethune Elementary was first named Immokalee Elementary School.

A review of the State Superintendent's Report in 1939-40 indicated that schools for Black children needed some improvement. According to the Report, some improvements had been made in some areas of the Florida and greater in some phases than others. However, hundreds of classrooms for Black children were still needed to house adequately Black school children; additional equipment and supplies were also needed. Many of the social issues that impacted Black children in the Collier county school districts were problematic for the school districts across the state of Florida. According to the report, transportation for Black children still needed some attention for Black children to ensure that Black children have access to a public high school.

In conversation with friends, former students and personnel associated with Bethune Schools, I think, I detected a sense of pride and joy to have an opportunity to share their inner most thoughts about the school. I think most of us enjoyed our educational experiences at Bethune. A few commented that it is a privilege to reflect on the experiences associated with our early childhood experiences in Bethune Elementary and High Schools. I believe some of our former students were excited to share more than forty years memories, anecdotes, comment about the changes in town, and greet old friends that are still living in Immokalee. A town that was rural and most jobs were primarily seasonal agricultural work. It was a town where a large population of people would come in to harvest the crops and suddenly leave as quickly as they came. This migratory pattern also reflected in the classrooms as some students would start the term late and sometime leave before the end of the school year. Obviously, the migratory pattern had some impact on children graduation and academic performance while in school. However, many of the students in the school parents did not migrate to other areas of the country to work the farms to support their families. Some of these individuals are currently living and working at various occupations in Lee, Collier Counties and other areas in the region that are within driving distance. Considering the challenges that confronted the children, I do not recall our teachers labeling us because of our socioeconomic status. They continued to teach with hopes that we would learn. In later years, someone said, "you cannot choose your circumstances, but you can choose how to overcome them."

#### **Old Bethune Elementary School 1953- 1957**

In the early 1950's, racial segregation in public schools was the norm across America. Although all the schools in each district were supposed to be equal, most Black schools were far inferior to their white counterparts. ([lisa@www.watson.org](mailto:lisa@www.watson.org)) Schools in Collier County were no exception. It is possible that during this era, some teachers may have taught school with only a high school diploma. Some of the information contained in this document was attained from other students that attended Bethune Elementary School in Immokalee, what I thought were some of my early educational experiences,

bussed to Dunbar High School in Fort Myers, Florida and compiled from conversations with former students, children of former teachers that taught at Bethune School, or may have attended Bethune School. It was a small town, and everyone knew each other's family. It so small that if there was an altercation on the way home from school, children were disciplined at school the next day and on a few occasions, the next year if you had a fight on the last day of school.

### **Kindergarten 1952**

Now, I can start by saying, according to my parents, we came to Immokalee sometime in 1950. I can truly say that I remember when Immokalee was a cow pasture. I would get up in the morning and somebody cows would be all around our house. We lived over by the old railroad tracks. It was behind where the county jail is located today.

At some point, around 1952, I started kindergarten. Ms. Chambers (formally known as Sister Chambers, owner of the Drive Inn Restaurant on Main Street or the Naples road) was our kindergarten teacher. I am not sure if it was sanctioned by Collier County School System. But we had a kindergarten. The building was in the area here the quick stop food store is located today and beyond that was a cow pasture. In the school, we were taught our alphabets, numbers, and how to read. I, along with my other children could read as we entered the first grade.

### **First through Sixth Grade 1953-1958**

The grades were 1- 8th. The hours were from 8:00 through 3:30. Children got to and from school by walking. Female student could not wear shorts of dresses that were above the knee and boys wore long pants with the shirt tucked inside their pant. We had a different teacher each year. In grades with few students, two grades were in the same classroom. If the children needed discipline, then they would stay after school or pick up paper on campus or receive a spanking from either the teacher or principal. There were children living in a place (Cummings Camp) just outside of Immokalee. They walked to school or received a ride from parents of neighbors. There was a path behind the school that children used as a short cut to walk to school.

Although segregation was the norm during this era, a Puerto Rican family lived next door to Old Bethune Elementary School. Our first-grade class experienced something that, at the time, I do not think we fully understood just happened. Two of the kids met the physical characteristic to attend Immokalee Elementary School, one did not. Therefore, he could not attend Immokalee Elementary School, the school for white children. His parents did not want to separate the brothers. Therefore, all three at some point enrolled and attended Bethune Elementary School. His name is Luis George. I do not know if Luis recalls that experience. His mom would bring him to school, and he would run home. Eventually, he became comfortable with us, and we have experienced a lifetime of friendship. There was a Bethune Elementary before 1957. As I reflect on this experience, we learned to read. During recess time, we some time played horseshoes, soft ball, dodge ball or basketball.

In loving memory of our teachers that taught us to read, write, spell, numbers, and to respect ourselves as well as others. It is a fitting tribute for a job well done. Some of us at the time, I am one them, did not fully understand the need to earn a high school diploma. The classes were small, the books and desk

were used, nevertheless, their efforts to teach us our basic skills were tireless. They cared enough to discipline all who failed to not try to learn. Our teachers demanded and gave respect to students, parents and community. In return, they were revered in the community.

**Bethune Elementary from 1953 to 1957 were:**

Mr. Waymon Wiggins	Principal		
Mrs. Willie M. Williams-	First grade	Mrs. Willie M. Postelle	Fourth and Six grade
Ms. Katherine Davis	Second grade	Mrs. Bernice Rubin	Six grade
Mrs. Josie G. Wesley	Third grade		

I think I can speak for all of us that continue to pursue our dreams and achieved some level of accomplishments feel as I do. The fact that you could read helped you function in an ever-changing world. I thank my sisters and my teachers for learning how to read.

**Stanford Achievement Test**

During the early grades we were administered a test that was required by Collier County School Board to assess how well we have learned the basics. I think our teachers would administer this test for two or three days. Based on the attitude of our teachers, it was a very serious test. I am not sure of the results of the test. However, I heard comments that some of my classmates performed very well on this standardized test.

**Parents and Teachers**

It was evidence that teachers and parents relationships existed during this era. Behavior problems were not a major issue. At school, discipline was involved if you failed to not meet the standards or study your lessons. Occasionally, a teacher may say, "I taught and spanked your mother and I will do the same to you." Some kids were disciplined both at home and school. Teachers in Immokalee received enormous respect in the community. It was a very small place, and everyone knew your family.

**Bussing Across County Lines**

Children that completed the eighth grade were bussed to Dunbar High School in Lee County. Children from Everglade City, Ochopee, Jerome, Copeland, and Naples were transported to Dunbar High School in Fort Myers, Florida until Bethune High School was built in Immokalee, Florida in 1957.

**Bethune Elementary and High School 1957-1967**

I cannot help but notice that this event is celebrating Bethune elementary school-starting 1957-1967. There are some major parts of Bethune that is missing from its history. As I previously stated, I started first grade in 1953, at old Bethune elementary school on the east side of Immokalee. A fence still surrounds the land today. At that site, we had grades first through eighth grades. I think that some of you here today may be able to account for some history before 1953. The school consisted of one large building, a smaller building, and a small church across the street. (If I am not mistaken, the church across the street is still there). My second-grade class was housed in that building. Ms. Davis was our second-grade teacher. I cannot recall her first name. I passed by there a few weeks ago and I notice the

basketball court is still in the same location from 1950. It has been updated. Those kids that graduated from the eighth grade were bussed to Dunbar high school in Fort Myers (Lee County). The bus picked up kids from everglades, stopped in Immokalee and travel on to Fort Myers. They left home in the dark and returned in the dark during certain times of the year. It was very cold catching the school bus during the winter months.

**Please see the name of principals and teachers starting in 1953-1958.**

Principals	Grade	Teachers	Academic Year
Mrs. Willie M. Postelle	First	Mrs. Willie M. Williams Stephens	1953-1954
Mr. Waymon Wiggins	Third	Mrs. Josie G. Wesley	1955-1956
Mrs. Bernice I. Rubin	Fifth	Mrs. Freddie M. Clark	1957-1958

It was a very small teaching environment. Some said, "It takes a village to raise a child." It is so true that caring teachers that worked in this made a difference in our learning and later life experiences. Many of us still today acknowledge the care given by our principal and teachers.

**First Grade Class (1953)**

**Teacher: Mrs. Willie M. (Williams) Stephens**

Cornelius Anderson  
 Callie P. Cochran  
 Clarethia Dennis  
 Barbara A. Fuller  
 Luis George  
 Edward German, Jr.  
 Betty J. Harrell  
 Arthur Lewis  
 Eartha M. Owens

Bennie L. Perdue  
 Nathaniel Postelle  
 Mamie Lou Scriben  
 Geraldine Smith  
 John Smith  
 Rosa M. Thomas  
 Ida Vereen  
 Irene Warren

**Bethune High School 1957 – 1968**

Collier County School Board opened the new Bethune High School in the fall of 1957. It was in a great location. The school had a school cafeteria, classrooms that were designed for lab work, wood shop, home economics, and showers. One of the most intriguing features of Bethune School was it restrooms. The restrooms had glass mirrors, always clean, toilet paper and paper towels. Bethune students did not deface or write all over the walls.

The public schools for African Americans in Collier County during this era are inextricably intertwined. There was only one public high school for African American school age children in the county. Therefore, these kids were transported by bus to Bethune High School in Immokalee. Some of these students lived along highway twenty-nine. Starting in Everglades, kids were picked up from Ochopee, Copeland, Jerome, and Cummers Camp. The high school in Naples opened in the early sixties. Children from trail continued being bussed to Immokalee.

Bethune High School course was of some interest during this period. The school offered English, Algebra, Chemistry, Typing, Geography, Health Science, Home Economics, Band, and Physical Education.

Near the end of the academic year in 1964-65, we were given a small red and black book that covered the spread of communism. It was mandatory for our teachers to teach students this material before the school year ended. Mr. Cambridge taught this class.

**Principal and Teachers 1957- 1968**

<b>Principals</b>	<b>Year</b>
Mr. Harold Clark	1957 – 1962
Mr. Eugene Williams	1962 – 1968

**Secretary**

Mrs. Lucille Rubin Bradshaw	1957 – 1958
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**Teachers**

	<b>Course(s)</b>
Ms. Addie V. Bowles	Home Economics/ Physical Education
Mrs. Julia Clemons Cambridge	Algebra /Typing
Mr. Kermit Cambridge	Geography/Civics/ Coached Baseball
Mr. Weldon Cheeseborough	English
Mr. Alphonso Hearst	Health/ Physical Education/Coached Boys and Girls Basketball/Track and Field
Mrs. Luella Lee Robinson	English/ Librarian
Ms. Mamie Martin	Chemistry
Mr. Joseph Walden	Music/Band
Custodian	Mr. Colee
Bus Driver	Mr. Willie Perry
Cafeteria	Mrs. Truesdell
	Mrs. Willie M. Crosby

**Bethune School Song**

(Sung to the Tune of Auld Lang Synes)

Surrounded by the Virgin Green, a Great Shrine beneath the sky.  
Here stands the school we love so well, our Glorious Bethune High.  
To Gold and Blue forever true, will be till Life has pasted.  
Oh, may thy Spirit guide our youth, to hold to the steadfast.

The halls ring out the sound of cheer, oh Faithful Bethune High.  
The walls stand firm amidst the palms, which kiss the southern sky.  
Oh, hail to the dear Bethune High, oh Shrine of Gold and Blue.  
No matter wherever we roam.....our Hearts are True to You.

**Secret to inspiration**

Poem on Principal Eugene Williams' Door  
Once a task has once begun  
Never quit until it's done  
Be ye the labor large or small  
Do it well or not at all  
Author Unknown.

**Class of 1959**

John Truesdell ( Need name of classmates) Eight in class

**Class of 1960**

Jenny B. Rubin  
Johnny Greene

Raymond Jennings  
Willie Warren

**Class Of 1962**

**Bethune High School Seniors**

**Homeroom Teacher/Class Sponsor: Ms. Addie V. Bowles**

Lula M. Anderson

Manies James, Jr.

Tom Bradshaw

Willie B. Riley

Willie Brown

Raymond F. Truesdell Class President

Elizabeth Dennis

Emory D. Hamilton

Clara L. Hooks

Baccalaureate Sunday June 3, 1962 at 3:30 P.M.

Speaker: Reverend S.W. McKinney, Pastor Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church

Commencement Thursday June 7,1962 at 8:00 P.M.

Speaker: Mr. Eugene Williams, Principal Lincoln Park Academy, Fort Pierce, Florida

Both Affairs will be held in the Bethune School Cafeteria

**Class Of 1963**

Samuel Barber

Geraldine Hodges

Salena Christopher

Robert Thomas

Betty Ann Handy

James Truesdell

Arthur Hooks

Ruth Yulee

**Class of 1965**

**Bethune High School Seniors**

**Homeroom Teacher: Mrs. Luella (Lee) Robinson**

Cornelius Anderson

Bennie L. Perdue

Myrtle E. Bowles

Nathaniel Postelle

Claretha Dennis

Jerry Scott

Edward German, Jr

Ann Thomas

Carolyn Frazier

Rosa M. Thomas

Barbara A. Fuller

Irene Warren

Benjamin Hooks, Jr.

**Class of 1966**

Peggy Campbell

Vivian Smith

Woodrow Knighton

Brenda Warren

Terry Warren

**Class of 1967**

**Home Room Teacher: Ms. Mamie Martin**

James E. Bingam  
Willie Ed Cochran  
Willie Ruth McSwain  
Patricia Ann Williams  
Isaac James

Eddie Lee Smith  
James W. Smith  
Margaret Warren  
Lonnie Pray Jr.  
Willie J. Underwood

**GRADUATION EXERCISE**

BETHUNE SCHOOL

Immokalee, Florida

May 28 – 31, 1967

EUGENE C. WILLIAMS

Principal

## **COLLIER COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD YELLOW DELIVERY TRUCK**

Considering the need for school equipment, some of our books, desk, and chairs were transported to Bethune on the back of a yellow truck. Most often, they were taken from Immokalee High School. Bethune High School children were given the used items from across town. The yellow pickup truck would deliver the desk, books or other necessary equipment all stacked on the back of that little yellow vehicle. The custodian and others would unload the truck and place them in the classroom or library. Although used things were sent to our school, our teachers made good use of whatever teaching materials that was available. I do not recall teachers complaining, commenting about our receiving outdated learning materials. If there were complaints, it was not where we could hear any of their negative comments associated about what we as Black children in Immokalee were experiencing during the segregated era. They used what was available to teach kids that, from all accounts, especially the environmental factors associated with a seasonal based economy, were predisposed to fail. Not all of us were able to achieve the level of achievements that come with getting a quality education, however the values that were taught in and outside of the school day were immeasurable. Those of us that continue our journey on a more productive path came to better understand that Collier County School Board hired the best Black teachers in Florida. They cared about some of us and would take the time to provide wise counsel. After years of discussion with friends, classmates, and associates, we as children had a very small, nurturing and structure teaching environment.

### **Bethune Elementary from 1953 to 1957 were:**

Mr. Waymon Wiggins	Principal		
Mrs. Willie M. Williams-	First grade	Mrs. Willie M. Postelle	Fourth and Six grade
Ms. Katherine Davis	Second grade	Mrs. Bernice Rubin	Six grade
Mrs. Josie G. Wesley	Third grade		

In the final analysis, it was not the used books, desks, chairs that made a difference in our lives during The segregated era. It was our teachers. For us as school age children to learn, we had to first open the book and read. They provide us with a template to find our own way in a difficult and challenging era. We all owe a debt of gratitude to our teachers that cared enough to leave the light on so we could find out way. Some of us needed that light to see ourselves in the mirror of life away from Bethune High School, Immokalee, Florida. Although some of them are not here with us at this moment, but the values, criticism, words of encouragement some continue to ring true today. They shared with us some words of wisdom that we will need to live a meaningful and wholesome lifestyle.

### **Bethune High School Elementary and High School Teachers, Staff and Principals 1953-1968**

#### Principals

Mr. Waymon Wiggins  
Mrs. Willie Mae Postelle Harper  
Mr. Harold H. Clark (1956-1962)  
Mr. Eugene (Champ) Williams (1962-1968)

**Secretary**

Anne Bradshaw Brown

**Bus Drivers**

Mr. Willie Perry Copeland, Florida

Mr. Ellis Gloster Naples, Florida

**Cafeteria Workers**

Ms. Theresa Anderson

Mrs. Willie Mae Crosby

Mr. Johnny Greene

Mrs. P. Fryson

Mrs. Thelma Truesdell

**Janitors**

Mr. James Crosby

Mr. Coley

Rev. Benjamin Hooks, Sr

**Teachers**

Mr. Felton Armstrong

Mr. Lazvada Baggett

Ms. Addie V. Bowles

Ms. Harriet Brown

Ms. Retha Butler

Mrs. Julia Clemons Cambridge

Mr. Kermit Cambridge

Mr. Weldon Cheeseborough

Mrs. Freddie Mae Clark

Ms. Alfredia Cross

Ms. Katherine Davis

Ms. Bobbie Fowler

Mrs. Frances Gardner Fuller

Mr. Dan Gardner

Mrs. Ruth Hargard

Mrs. Willie Mae Postelle Harper

Mr. Alphonso Hearst

Mr. Clayton Hodge

Mrs. Shirley Hodge

Mrs. Carrie Howard

Mrs. Dorcus Howard

Mr. Phil Jackson

Ms. Pamala James

Mr. Henry Jones

Mrs. Rosamary Jones

Mrs. Irene Pugh

Mrs. Luella Robinson

Mrs. Bernice Rubin

Mrs. Izette Redmon

Ms. Alzonias Roberts

Mr. Ted Roebuck

Mrs. Merdis Sampson

Mrs. Dorothy Hooks Scavella

Mrs. Carolyn B. Smith

Mr. Richard Stebbins

Mrs. Willie Mae Williams Stephens

Ms. Quida Taylor

Ms. Veline Taylor

Ms. Francis Tompkins

Mrs. Janell Walden

Mr. Joseph Walden

Mr. Riley Ware

Mrs. Shirley Watson

Mrs. Josie G. Wesley

Mr. Flip Williams

Mrs. Gloria Fuller Williams

Mrs. Mary C. Williams

Mrs. Dorothy Wilson

## Acknowledgement and appreciation

I want to express my appreciation to my wife Myrtle Elaine Sampson Perdue for listening and helping me to put in perspective the pervasive mind-set of the teachers, and Collier County School Board during this period.

I want to acknowledge the following people for their support, contributions of numerous pictures, feedback, extended conversations about our early years at Bethune Elementary and High School, and for sharing memories of our years at our school.

Mr. Harold H. Clark, Principal  
Bethune High School

Mrs. Lucille Bradshaw

Mrs. Elaine Lane

Mr. Benjamin Hooks, Jr

Mr. Frank Massey Deceased

Mr. Raymond Truesdell

Mr. Terry Warren

Mrs. Brenda Warren Bacon

Ms. Claudette Williams

Mr. Willie Warren

Mr. Edward German

I want to thank Ms. Laura Bass, Florida Documents Librarian, State Library & Archives of Florida, for her many hours of searching the files of Florida for the origin of Bethune Elementary School in Collier County. I thank you for your support and assistance. I thank you for your support, listening and caring enough to help me pull together as much information as possible.

## References

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Tebeau, Charlton W. 1966. Florida's Last Frontier The History Of Collier County. University Of Miami Press. p.132.