

STORER COLLEGE:

A Hope for Redemption in the Shadow of Slavery, 1865 – 1955

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## **Storer College: A Hope for Redemption in the Shadow of Slavery, 1865 – 1955**

**Dawne Raines Burke**

### **ABSTRACT**

This historical study investigated the genesis, unfolding, contributions, and demise issues associated with the institution of Storer College. The primary goal was to produce an institutional narrative of Storer College that acknowledged the depth and dimension of its 90-year history, and recognized its three utmost administrators: the Doctors Brackett, McDonald, and McKinney. The inquiry incorporated a broad range of primary and secondary sources, including previously untapped archival resources, in reconstructing the institution's narrative. The study is predominantly set against the divergence of compounding social, economic, and political forces, including its relationship with the State of West Virginia that outlined the institution's development over time. The global questions that framed the study were: What was Storer College? How did it change over time? Following the Civil War's destruction, the nation underwent an extended period of reconstruction. Storer College grew out of several efforts exerted by the Free Will Baptists, a northern denomination under the aegis of the Northern Baptist Convention, who believed that education should be the primary focus for improving freedmen in the Shenandoah Valley. Storer College was first established in West Virginia by the Free Will Baptists Home Mission Society through its Shenandoah Mission center, as the Harper's Ferry Mission School in 1865. In time, the institution experienced four overlapping developmental phases: (a) Mission School, 1865 – 1867, (b) Secondary Division, 1867 – 1884, (c) Secondary Expansion Division, 1884 – 1921, and (d) Collegiate Division, 1921 – 1955 before its closure in the wake of the 1954 *Brown et al. v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* decision. With the outgoing class of 1955, the institution was ultimately dismantled and subsumed under the federal aegis of the United States Department of Interior by 1960. Despite limited funding, Storer College functioned as a social change agent since through its institutional development it correspondingly contributed to the individual development of its students' literacy, morality, self-dependency, self-advocacy, and self-assertion. These collective actions were among the first efforts toward community-building between and among the African-American community and consequently the community's greater relationship with the American society.

For *three families*: ancestral, ethical, and ethereal.

The first, I want to dedicate this manuscript to my *ancestral family* and husband,

**D. Michael Burke, II,**

whose marital devotion, sacrifice, understanding, finance,  
and—perhaps most importantly—whose advanced degree of personal maturity  
created the space that allowed me  
to find *myself from within, and through myself*.

It needs also be dedicated to the two most wonderful gifts we, as a married couple, could  
have ever given to the world: our two children,

**D. Michael Burke, III and Logan Gray Burke**

who, together, comprise the  
*music of our lifetime*.



This manuscript must also be dedicated to my *ethical family*, the second,  
those closely connected with Storer College,  
without whose support, trust, heartfelt encouragement, and without whose willingness  
to educate *myself from without, and beyond myself*,  
the manuscript's production would have been absolutely inconceivable.

Specifically, they are:

**Dr. Richard Ishmael McKinney**, President of Storer College (1944 – 1950)

**Dr. Houston George Brooks, Jr.**, Member, SCNAA Executive Board of Directors

**Mary Julia Bowles Harris**, President, SNCAA

**David Henry Cole**, Historian, SCNAA

**Guinevere Roper**, HFNHP Ranger & Black History Specialist

**William Pinchback**, Member, SCNAA Executive Board of Directors

and finally, but certainly not least of all,

**George Wessel Hancock**, who contributed significantly to the early chronology and  
reconstruction process associated with the school's institutional narrative

because he, quite uniquely, graduated three times from Storer College:

Secondary [and Expansion] Divisions (1932)

Junior College (1934)

Senior College (1936)



In conclusion, I, both dedicate and acknowledge my *ethereal family*, a **Great Unknown**, for  
granting to me the lifetime during which I have been given the *truest sense of sustenance and  
illumination* through my *three families' love*, and this phenomenal learning experience.