

Educator Rufus F. Hardin 1859-1949

There was only one school for African-Americans in Brown County in 1917 - and while it enjoyed no fixed location, it was this school that was to become the R.F. Hardin High School in 1934.

Rufus Forley Hardin was born a slave in Kaufman County, Texas in 1857. He started school at the age of 13 and four years later he left to work on a cattle drive to Kansas where he attended a Kansas school for eight months. He returned to Texas and enrolled in Sulphur Springs school. At the age of 20 he taught school in Van Zandt County and married Mary Vasher when he was 22.

His initial foray into farming was near Canton, but he later bought land in Kaufman County near Terrell. Hardin accepted a position of teacher with Brownwood Schools in 1896. He earned a BA from Prairie View College and his wife died in 1903 when Rufus was just six weeks from receiving his MA.

While he was farming, he taught school in the winter - and attended classes at several other schools - including Waco's Paul Quinn College and Austin's Tillotson College. In 1905 he married Mary Jane Lasseter - a woman who shared his passion for education.

Hardin was a leader in the Lee Chapel AME Church - the same one founded by George Smith in the 1880s. When funds were low, the Hardins often spent their own money for supplies. Hardin also helped fill the Bailey subdivision by building homes and selling them to responsible families - at affordable terms.

In January of 1934 Mary died and Rufus had a stroke. He was unable to return to teaching - but a remarkable record of 38 years is a fine legacy that few can equal. He died in 1949, at the age of 90, but the school is still standing - and after restoration - it should continue as a memorial to a pioneer educator of Brown County.