

## **History of Dunbar High School**

### **The Early History and Dunbar High School till 1993**

By Mary Jo Henderson Wilson

Written records and oral accounts of when Dunbar began are in conflict, but it is believed that organized education in Lubbock for Blacks started in about 1920 with a Miss Sadie Taylor as the first Black teacher. Classes were offered in a servant's quarters. In 1921, a Mrs. Butler was hired. About 20 Black students were in attendance at that time. In 1922, Miss Ella R. Carruthers (some accounts state Miss. Ella R. Winn) was hired by Black parents to teach. She had her classes in the Mount Gilead Baptist Church at 17th Street and Ave. A. She had about 50 students. Miss Carruthers later became Mrs. Ella R. Iles (Ella R. Iles Elementary School was named for Mrs. Iles). Black residents with children of school age made the initial appeal to the School Board for a public school for Blacks. The School Board contended there were no funds available for the purchase of land nor the construction of a building. Efforts got under way by the Will Sedberry, Calvin Quigley, Waymon Henry, "Cat" Means, T.S. Jamison and other Black families, to raise money to buy a lot for a school. A lot was purchased at 17th Street between Avenue B and C. A two-room building was constructed on the land in about 1923 that had been purchased by the Black community. In the fall of 1923, Mrs. Ella R. Iles was hired by the School Board as Teacher/Principal, and Dunbar School had its formal beginning. In 1925, the school population continued to grow. By this time, the enrollment was about 226 students. Classes were also being offered in the Presbyterian Church across the street from the school. Mr. William M. H. Wilson was hired as a Teacher/Principal. In 1927, the students named their school Dunbar after the Black poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Five students graduated from the high school in 1928, but the high school only went to the 10th grade. Another room was added to the school in 1929. Soon Mrs. Wilson, wife of the principal, was hired. By 1930, the Black population in Lubbock had grown to over 1,000 people. Professor E. C. Struggs began his 35-year career as principal of Dunbar. Mr. Struggs became affectionately known as "Prof," and "Prof Struggs" not only served as a great educator, but was also an outstanding community leader. "Prof" Struggs requested and received permission to add an additional grade to Dunbar, to comply with new regulations that required 11 grades to meet high school requirements. A new school superintendent was hired and one of his first priorities was to upgrade Dunbar to achieve parity with the other high school in Lubbock. His actions resulted in the standardization of salaries and the adoption of a uniform philosophy of education. The course offerings were uniform as much as possible and a separate high school was requested. At 26th Street and Date Avenue, a totally new unit was built, and it was fully accredited when it opened in the fall of 1937. The student population continued to grow and

soon after the opening of the “new” Dunbar, the old Dunbar had to be used to provide enough space for the students. The late 1930s and the early 1940s saw the beginning of Dunbar’s athletic program with second-hand uniforms donated by Texas Tech and Lubbock High School. Mr. Charles Sedberry organized and coached the first Dunbar football team on a voluntary basis. Later, Mr. Damon Hill came to Dunbar as the first coach hired by the school board. “Prof” Hill built an athletic department that brought headlines and news clippings of the many victories won during the late 1940s and 1950s. The early 1950s also brought about changes in scholastic activities at Dunbar. Students were being recognized for their outstanding achievements in academics and other extra-curricular activities. In addition to college prep courses, the curriculum was expanded to offer courses in trade oriented areas. Mr. Roy Roberts became band director in 1952. Mr. Roberts remained band director for 18 years. The Dunbar band, choir and combo became known throughout the state for their outstanding marching and concert performances. Sweepstakes were won in the Black Interscholastic League at Prairie View College and later in the University Interscholastic League. The 1950s also saw a larger number of Dunbar graduates attend college. Many of the students earned scholarships to different colleges and universities, in and out of state. In 1958, Dunbar moved to a new facility. At that time, it was among the most modern facilities in the state. “Prof” Struggs continued to see his beloved Dunbar grow in every aspect, and in 1965, when he retired, the school had an enrollment in excess of 1,000 students. E. C. Struggs Junior High School was built and became Dunbar’s only feeder school. Mr. George Scott became principal in 1965 through 1969. Mr. William R. Powell, a Dunbar graduate, was principal from 1969 through 1970. Both principals experienced continued growth and progress.

In 1970-71, Mr. Roy Roberts became principal of Dunbar. Under pressure from the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the school board desegregated Dunbar/Struggs by redrawing their district boundaries. Dunbar became Lubbock’s first integrated senior high school. Dunbar was integrated four days before the start of the 1970-71 academic year by orders of U.S. Judge Halbert O. Woodward. The district began busing about 2,000 students including those displaced by the closing of E. C. Struggs Junior High School. Mr. Roberts retired in 1984. Mr. Roberts retired with the reputation of having “discipline and love for the students and faculty,” that made Dunbar the most unique high school in Lubbock. He knew almost every student by name. He also knew most of the parents, too.

In 1985, Mr. Virgil Johnson, another Dunbar graduate, became principal. Dunbar was the pride and backbone of the community. Dunbar was a tradition. Every kid in the neighborhood wanted to attend Dunbar. Entire families had graduated from and had become a part of the tradition

associated with the school. Dunbar had a history of achievement, both scholastically and athletically; a history that developed pride and a tradition of a caring faculty.

The end of a 70-year era came to a close in 1993. As a part of the Lubbock Independent School District's reorganization plan, the board voted to end the diploma granting status of Dunbar High School. As the tradition ends, a part of Black History that the school represented will end. Some of the Dunbar exes who returned to teach at and who helped close the doors of the high school are Joe McWilliams (coach), Mrs. Mary Jo Wilson (band and activities director), Luis Chavez (coach), Jerry Mitchell (auto- tech), Marcus Brown (assistant coach) and Virgil Johnson (principal).