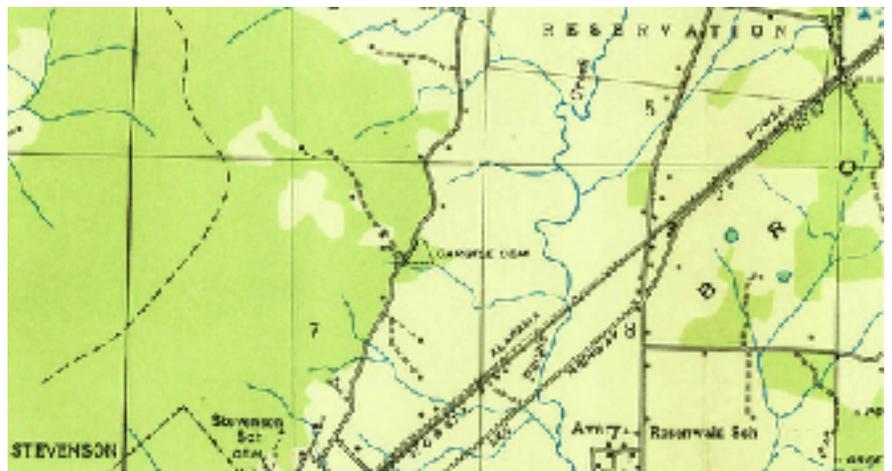


## Averyville School

Averyville was a Quaker school in Stevenson organized to meet the needs of newly freed African-Americans between 1865 and the early 1870s.



This article about the school appeared in the 2012 *Jackson County Chronicles* and was written by Ann B. Chambless. She was greatly assisted by Eddie E. Davis, Jr., an alumnus of Alabama A&M University who was living in Normal, Alabama, who was writing a biography of Dr. Council in 2012 when the historical association was preparing materials required to erect the Averyville historical marker in Stevenson. He generously provided documents and information from his research that assisted greatly in this summary.

There is nothing that separates individuals, collective groups, nations, and the world more than the lack of the ability to communicate by means of the written. This factor quickly rose to the forefront during the initial days of the Reconstruction Period in 1865. In the post-War South, attaining an education was both a symbolic step away from slavery and a practical goal for southern blacks who realized they needed the ability to understand legal documents and labor contracts. In March 1865, the Federal government established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands that came to be called the Freedmen's Bureau. The Civil War had been a humanitarian disaster, not only for the soldiers but also for those who were left destitute at the close of the war.

This group included both whites and blacks. In Alabama, twelve Bureau districts were established to provide healthcare, food, and buildings for schools for one year for both blacks and whites.

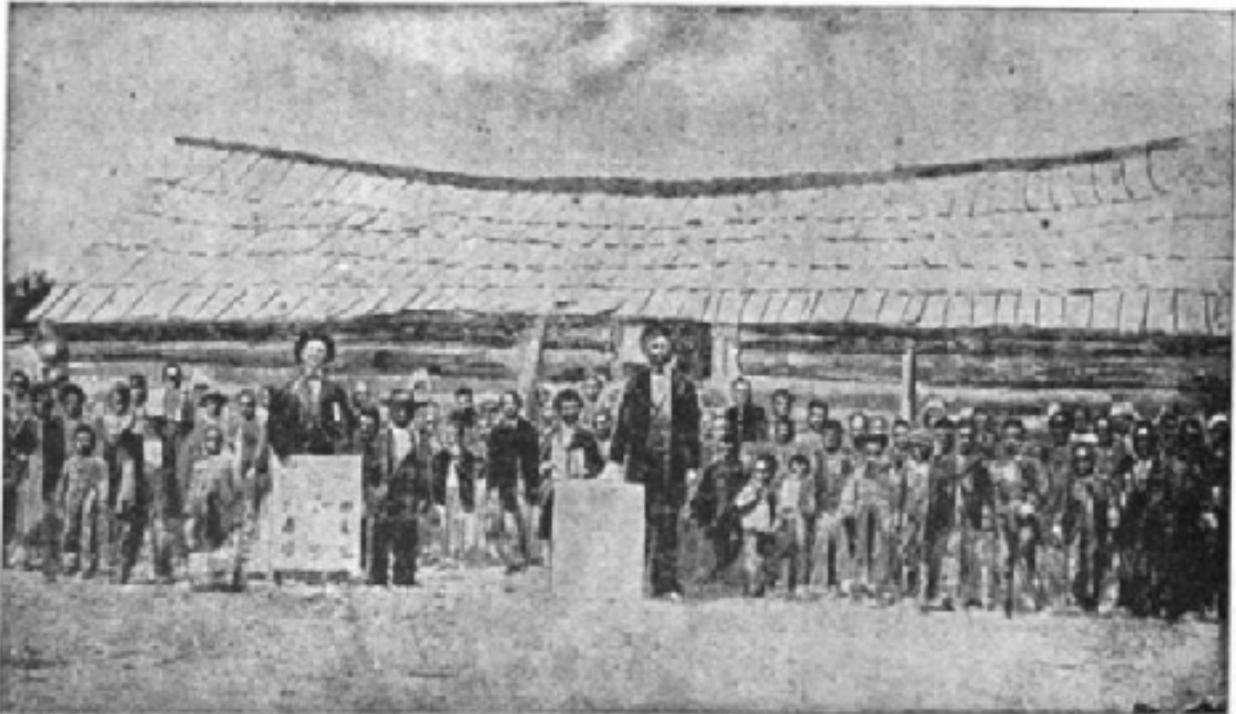
Voluntary organizations stepped in to fill the gaps of the Freedmen's Bureau. A few wealthy individuals and American missionary associations began funding the schools and sent teachers, more than half of them were white, female teachers. Methodists and Quakers took the lead in these efforts.

Before the War, Charles Avery, a wealthy white abolitionist from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was active in educating African Americans and helping escaped slaves. In 1849, Avery College in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, was built and donated to the College trustees by Charles Avery (who was also a Methodist minister) for the education of black youths, of both sexes.

When the Rev. Charles Avery died in 1858, he left \$300,000.00 to support Negro education. Possibly with funds from the Avery endowment, twenty acres of land in what was then the outskirts of Stevenson, Alabama, were purchased by Pennsylvania Quaker missionaries that soon became the home of "approximately 70 people of all ages". It is thought that the two schools established in this compound led to the name of Averyville (or Avery) in honor of the Reverend Charles Avery.

In 2012, Avery Street is a silent reminder of the first endeavor to educate black students in the area of Stevenson. To date, no living person has been found who remembers Avery School, but several documents have been found to support its existence between 1865 and 1870. The

most substantial are found in the “Friends Association for Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen” and will be quoted in the following discussion.



In 1867, a Quaker missionary, Wilmer Walton, came to Jackson County, Alabama, to serve in the Avery schools in the Stevenson area where he organized two First-Day schools without public school funds. The first building was described as a log building in a letter Walton wrote to the Quaker Journal, the *Friends' Intelligencer*. The following photo is taken from page 206 of G. F. Richlings' *Evidences of Progress Among Colored People*, published in 1902 in Philadelphia. The caption reads, “The only school ever attended by William Hooper Council.”

Professor Council is significant because he was the same William Hooper Council who founded the Colored Normal School in 1875 in Huntsville, Alabama, which became Alabama A & M University. Before he died in 1909, Dr. Council became one of the two most important and influential black men in Alabama, the other being Booker T. Washington.

On May 26, 1865, Wilmer Walton wrote a long letter from Stevenson to the “Friends’ Intelligencer” in which he gave a detailed description of his work in Stevenson. He also described day-to-day activities “in the village.”

Walton stated that he had “effected an arrangement” with General Wladimir Krsyzanowski (the Federal provost marshal in Stevenson who occupied the Main Street house now owned by John and Angela Graham) whereby the General “issued a license to Robert Caver, a worthy, industrious colored man—a preacher and a shoemaker—authorizing him to legally perform the marriage ceremony among



the colored population in this vicinity, keep a regular record thereof, and give each couple a marriage certificate.”

Walton further stated that “by this arrangement a regular surname will be established and all the former children of these re-married couples will now assume the family names adopted and recorded by their parents, whereas it has heretofore been a common thing for brothers and unmarried sisters to have two or three different surnames, they having lived with different masters.”

Walton wrote: “A short time since accompanied the said Robert Caver and his wife, who had been married many years since under the old code, up to the General’s headquarters and witnessed their legal marriage ceremony performed by Adjutant-General E. W. Breusinghausen of New York. This marriage is said to be the first couple of colored persons legally married by a U. S. Officer in the state of Alaba. Walt also stated: “The colored people have recently started quite an interesting, credible weekly periodical, The Colored Tennessean, edited by W. B. Scott and son at \$2.50 per annum. Walton stated that he (then) had 75 names on his school roll. He stated that none of his pupils had missed a day except in cases of sickness or some other unavoidable circumstance.

He described the level of his students’ reading and mentioned “the whole school, in the afternoon, practice upon their slates, some writing, some ciphering.” He also had a “large class in Jane Taylor’s Primary Physiology” and that he was just starting a class in geography. He had them “read in concert in the Testamento Bible Reader” and “recite some verse they had committed to memory”. After singing a hymn, he dismissed them for the day. Walton mentioned that on the first day of the month (of May), the colored people in Stevenson had “the first May Day festival ever held by them in the state of Alabama.”

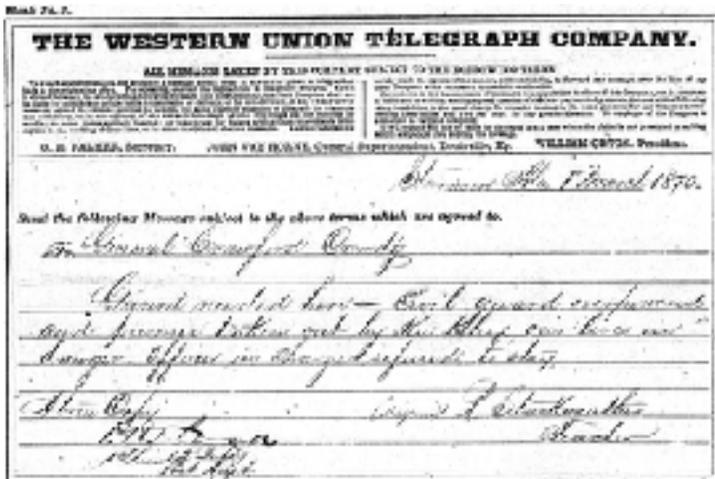
On the morning of May 1, 1865, Wilmer Walton obtained a pass from the Provost Marshal allowing him to take his group “beyond the picket lines and return.” He stated: “A 9:00 am, about 600 men, women, and children of all ages, arranged in couples, marched for about a mile out of to a large string in a beautiful grove where we spent the day very pleasantly.” He concluded his description of this remarkable day by stating: “Teachers, colored preachers, white spectators took turns in speaking and reading to the cheerful multitude, who frequently responded by singing. About 2:00 pm we were invited to partake of a dinner which, for quantity, quality, variety, and excellent cookery, would have done credit to any assembly of people convened for a similar purpose. After dinner one of my pupils, a young girl, was selected by a venerable old colored man of nearly 70 years of age, and appropriately crowned as ‘May Queen.’; The whole party returned home in an orderly manner in good season. I send per mail a photograph of my school here.”

The 1870 Federal census for Stevenson provides the name of another teacher in the freedman’s school in Averyville: Henrietta Robinson Starkweather, who was born in 1815 in Livingstonville, New York. Eddie E. David provided a photocopy of a very dim, old letter bearing a bureau stamp dated January 1869, Washington D.C. that chronicles Ms. Henrietta Starkweather’s journey to and arrival in Stevenson, Alabama. Ms Starkweather stated she went first to the Methodist Church that “was in wretched condition.” She further stated “Then we went to Averyville, the colored settlement, to see the place where the school house was built. There was nothing to show that a house had ever been there. A school house was the first building the tract (meaning the tract purchased in 1865 for the freedman’s community that was named Averyville. Now there are ten buildings. All have spoken with regret of the burning of the (school) building and say it was probably done by a drunken, worthless wretch, but he never dared to brag of his exploit in public. Sentiment was so much against him. (This was the school building in Wilmer Walton’s photo.) Ms. Starkweather further stated, “Mr. Council, the colored teacher, was our tour guide to Averyville.” She went on to say, “This evening my hostess stated

they will have nothing to do with me if I teach the colored children so that is the word I go to bed on. We have given out the word that the school for colored children will open next Monday in the Methodist Church. In vie of the poverty of the freemen, I would solicit a government appropriation of \$55.00 to provide a suitable room or to replace the burned (one) for those still downtrodden people.”

Ms. Starkweather stated that her initial guide through Averyville was William Council who “had learned his letter in 1864. He stated that he is the best scholar of that school. He’s just 21 and were he not a married man I should think he was worthy of a scholarship in the Ashman Institute. He will be very glad to belong to the Normal class, if he can teach. At the same time, he says there are several girls in this place that he says can do the same.”

This letter indicated that Henrietta Robinson Starkweather gave William Hooper Council a solid recommendation that most likely resulted in his being able to begin teaching in Huntsville, Alabama at an early age. She stated in her letter that he had been paid the small sum of \$19.00 for his teaching in Averyville and that Council said he would have to go back to his old job as a waiter unless he could get an increase in his teacher pay.



That Ms. Starkweather had to deal with more than imparting knowledge is borne out by her March 1870 Western Union telegraph that she sent to general Crawford, telling him “Guard Needed Here” in Stevenson. As seen from Ms. Starkweather’s May 1870 telegram, the freemen’s school in Stevenson (as well as other schools throughout the Souther) were not without their problems and detractors. The U. S. Congress created a Join Select Committee to inquire into the condition of affairs in the Southern States, and depositions taken by committee chairmen are available in the National Archives. Some Alabama records are also available in the Alabama

Department of Archives and History. This record group is entitled “Condition of Affairs in the Southern State” and provides numerous pages covering depositions taken from Stevenson/ Averyville residents who were threatened an/or attacked by the KKK. One example is the deposition of a man named Daniel, which was taken in Huntsville, Alabama, on October 14, 1871, wherein Daniel stated he left Stevenson on March 3, 1870, to see safety in Huntsville because “disguised men repeatedly came to the little village we called Avery, about three-quarters of a mile east of (downtown) Stevenson” and threatened him and his neighbors. Two of the neighbors he mentioned were Lewis Jackson and Miles Prior. Daniel further stated “they (KKK men) went into several store and groceries and got coal oil and said they were going to burn that little town of Avery. They wanted to burn our school house.”

Daniel stated that he had a good deal of property and “all of it was destroy” and then they (KKK) imprisoned him “in a bad underground place.” Repetitive threats and intimidation of this nature that continued in the early 1870s resulted in the closed of the Stevenson school and the teacher returning to their native states.

In 1870, Henrietta R. Starkweather, age 54, a white female school teacher born in New York, was enumerated in Stevenson, Alabama. All of her closest neighbors were blacks or mulattoes. One of her neighbors was James Humphreys, age 39, black male, who worked on the farm of Peter Pinder. Ms. Starkweather’s closest white neighbors were Johnson Hackwork, James

Cargile, Jackson Wimberley, and Daniel Cameron. On the other end of town, Robert Cave, age 33, mulatto, boot and shoe maker, lived next door to William A Austin., age 58, white dry good merchant and William Burch, age 60, white, farmer.

In 1880, Henrietta R. Startweather, age 65, school teacher, was living with her sister, Margaret S. Hess, in Milo in Yates County, New York. Milo was found ca. 1788 by the Universal Friends who were struck Quakers.

## The Averyville Historical Marker

An historical marker on Old Mount Carmel Road is at the approximate the location of the school. This site would later also serve as the location for the Stevenson Rosenwald School.

On June 9, the Jackson County Historical Association, Stevenson Mayor Ricky Steele, a group of alumni from Alabama A & M led by alumni association president Dr. Charlotte Teague, and proud citizens on Stevenson dedicated the county's new Averyville Historic Marker, located on Old Mt. Carmel Road in Stevenson.



This marker is the result of an inquiry by Eddie Davis, an alumnus of Alabama A&M University, who has written a biography of William Hooper Council, founder of A&M. Mr. Davis contacted the Jackson County Historical Association asking for information on Averyville, near Stevenson. From the sources found by Ann Chambless, Jackson County's premier historian, and information and sources shared by Mr. Davis, an unknown piece of Stevenson history has been brought to light.

The Stevenson City Council completely funded this effort, purchasing the marker, acquiring property as close as possible to the historical Averyville site, and providing a small park to house the marker. The JCHA thanks the City of Stevenson, the City Council, and Mayor Ricky Steele for their efforts to get this marker placed.

