

Boggs Academy History



Boggs Academy, a Presbyterian school founded in 1906 in Keysville, Burke County, Georgia, under the aegis of the Board of Missions for Freedmen, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., was an outstanding college-preparatory academy for African Americans. The school was closed in 1984. In its seventy-eight-year history Boggs Academy grew from meager beginnings to an institution of acknowledged educational excellence, recognized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, which accredited the school in 1943.

In *The Rise and Decline of the Program of Education for Black Presbyterians of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1865-1970*, Inez Moore Parker recounts the early history of Boggs. She states:

Deep in the heart of the “Black Belt” of Georgia, where superstition and ignorance gripped the minds of the inhabitants, and where the seeds of discord between house slaves and field slaves and field shaves had germinated and taken root – the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. established the academy on a two-acre plot donated by a Baptist elder.

The identity of the “Baptist elder” referred to by Moore has been a matter of dispute. One researcher identified him as Morgan Walker, who was black. Phinazee Walker, a Presbyterian elder and fourth-generation Walker, informed the writer that at the end of the Civil War, his great-great-grandfather, Moses Walker gave land to each of his thirteen children in the northwest section of Burke County, near Waynesboro, Georgia. This section became known as “The Walker Settlement.”

Each of the thirteen children received land involving three and a half acres, divided by Beaver Dam Creek. Over the years, the land in the Walker family passed through successive generations: the “Walker Settlement” is still intact.

Morgan Walker was the son of Moses Walker (white) and Elizabeth Walker (black). As the generations developed, Rodney Walker, the son of Ryas Walker (known in family history as the first black Walker) became the grandfather of Phinazee Walker, and Morgan Walker, the brother of Ryas Walker, became the great-great-uncle of Phinazee.

Phinazee Walker relates that the Reverend John Lawrence Phelps, the founder of Boggs came to the area for the purpose of establishing a school built on Christian principles, which would educate African American youth. Phelps approached member of the Walker family, described his vision of a school, and successfully persuaded Rodney Walker and Morgan Walker to give two acres of land so that the first building could be erected. The tradition in the Walker family is that the land, through a “gentlemen’s agreement,” would never be sold and would always be kept available for the welfare of African Americans in the county.

The first structures on the Boggs campus were the school and a chapel. The school was named Boggs in honor of Mrs. Virginia Boggs, who was the corresponding secretary of the Board of Missions for Freedmen. The chapel was named Morgan Grove Presbyterian Church in honor of Morgan Walker. Phinazee Walker’s brother, Frank, left a historic note in which he says that the building of the church was completed in October 1909 and he (Frank) was the first infant baptized in the edifice, on Christmas Day 1909. Later in 1930, the original church was destroyed by fire and another building was erected through the generosity of the Blackburn family of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The new chapel, which is still standing on the Boggs campus, was named the Blackburn Presbyterian Church. Phinazee Walker was baptized there in 1931.

Phinazee Walker and his brother, the late Frank Walker, both attended Boggs Academy. Frank graduated from Boggs in 1928 as valedictorian of his class. Phinazee, who was younger, attended Boggs from 1927 to 1934, but did not graduate. He and a third brother, Albert Walker, reside in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Today, the campus of Boggs Academy has been converted to the Boggs Rural Life Center through an agreement, “A Covenant Between Boggs Rural Life Center, Inc. and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” Under this agreement, the mission of the center is to implement a wide variety of human and community development projects over a twenty county target area. The center, in partnership with local and national organizations, is conducting conferences and retreats, providing health screenings, prenatal and nutritional counseling, and is working with area school systems and several state institutions of higher education. The center is managed by a twenty-nine member board of directors and is