A Tale of Two Schools
An Exhibit Series

Eddy School: The Foundation of a Community
The Eddy School and Sallie Ellis Davis

The Eddy School was the first school for African Americans in Baldwin County, and was the only African American public school in Milledgeville until the 1940s. Dedicated to keeping education accessible for their children, a strong community formed around the Eddy School and the neighborhood it was located in.

Sallie Ellis Davis was the owner of this house from 1910 until her death in 1950. She was a teacher and principal at the Eddy School for over five decades, and was a respected community member. Dedicated to her students, Davis opened her home as a boarding house for students from rural areas who could not commute and would otherwise not have attended school.

Milledgeville was a segregated community at the time of the Eddy School’s founding and throughout its lifetime. The movie theater in town had a segregated stair entrance, shown above, for African Americans which is to the right of the main entrance. This is just one of the instances of segregation that students of the Eddy School faced every day.
After the Civil War the African American community of Milledgeville worked to form a school. The American Missionary Association (AMA) provided monetary support, along with the Freedmen’s Bureau, an organization set up through the Department of War to support the recently freed in the south.

The Freedmen’s Bureau’s full name was the United States Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned lands and was run by the war department. The Bureau was created to help implement reconstruction and aid the 4 million freed slaves transition form enslaved to free. The Bureau also aided hundreds of thousands of impoverished whites.

The Freedmen’s Bureau listed Wilkes Flagg, a former slave and an educational leader in the African American community, as a “colored member” and through funding from the AMA the Eddy School started in Flagg Chapel. Flagg donated church land for the school which was built in 1869, with classes continuing in the church through 1870.
Community Importance of Education

Though the Eddy School provided classes through eleventh grade, many students left after seventh to help their families or start working. However, each generation wanted to support the next in furthering their education. African American families in the city would board rural students, as transportation was not available.

Sallie Ellis Davis often boarded so many students that cots were brought into the hall of her house. Testimonies from the Sallie Ellis Davis Archives remember Davis supporting her students any way they needed; she brought lunch for one of her students, Mrs. L. W. Lane, every day and provided clothes for those who needed them.

My daddy - when I was going to Ft. Valley, we didn’t have a car, and I would be late sometimes, he would hold the bus up... the bus driver told me... say “when you get your diploma, your B.S., you come hand it to me, say, cause I helped you get it.” They were very nice though, and most of the time I wouldn’t be bout five minutes...

- Naomi Brannon, Tales from the Back Stoop. Courtesy of GCSU Special Archives.

Davis and the students she housed would have gathered in her parlor, they often listened to boxing matches on the radio. Courtesy of GCSU.
The Freedmen’s Bureau sent five white teachers who started the Eddy School by teaching in Flagg Chapel. These teachers gave monthly reports to the Bureau including data on the number of students enrolled, average attendance and punctuality, how many students were over sixteen, and the public sentiment regarding the school. The reports from three teachers Jeannie G. Warner, Mary E. Lands, and S. Wells’s reveal the changes in their classes and students from 1867 to 1868.

Their records show that boys and girls were almost equally likely to attend school, with girls sometimes attending more. Those who did attend past the age of sixteen were severely outnumbered by younger students. In reoccurring months, the teachers listed only one or no students over sixteen.

The school was also always listed as a primary school, as higher education was still largely inaccessible to the African American community. These teachers never listed the sentiment surrounding the school as negative. However, they often said the sentiment was “not unfavorable” instead of “favorable” and in April 1868 each teacher claimed to know nothing about the public sentiment.
The Eddy School stood from 1869 to 1947 on the land donated by Wilkes Flagg. By 1874 an African American man, Mr. O. L. Chatters was principal of the school and in 1899, the year Sallie Ellis Davis earned her master’s degree, the school was enlarged to a total of six rooms.

Frances Wingfield started teaching at Eddy in 1946 and remembers it as a wooden building. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Naomi Brannon was a student and remembers that they ate lunch outside because there was no lunchroom. According to her, the bathrooms were also outside and in bad condition.

So we went there at the door, and she went in and used the restroom. The bell rang, and the floor gave away... I looked over and I saw a limb. I grabbed the limb and I hand it to her and I pulled her up... My mother... said, “Well she did save a girl today, say cause that girl would have drowned in all that mess.

- Naomi Brannon, Tales from the Back Stoop, courtesy of GCSU Special Collections
The Georgia State Department of Education 1936 manual “Improvement in Instruction in the Negro Schools,” states that the aim of education was to create “good citizen[s] in a democratic society.” The manual continues by stating that school should focus on “the fundamental needs of the peasants and less to the need of making them literate.”

Despite this, the Eddy School’s curriculum was originally focused on literacy. In addition, Sillie Ellis Davis was remembered as a strict arithmetic teacher, who was so intimidating that Naomi Brannon would forget her lessons. Vocational subjects like sewing and agriculture were taught, and Frances Wingfield remembered the devotional services where first grade students recited the Lord’s Prayer and sang hymns.
Teachers were as important and respected as the elders in the community because of the importance placed on education. There was an understanding between parents and teachers about classroom material and discipline and children were raised to respect and follow the instruction of all of their elders, especially teachers. Naomi Brannon remembered that if an adult had to leave a classroom and told the students not to move, none of them would.

Teachers were also held to a very high standard within the community. They were not allowed to go out at night, with the exception being occasional movie attendance, but never a nightclub or social gathering. They had a very strict dress code that required minimal makeup. Brannon remembered that it was preferable for teachers to wear no makeup at all.

These rules were never official, but teachers were told them when they signed their contracts, and sometimes were given a list. These regulations continued into the 1950s. The state of Georgia also saw the teachers’ responsibilities as improving the communities, as the 1936 manual states, “as the community advances it will sweep the students along.”
After fires in 1925 and 1947, Eddy’s classes were held in various churches, including Flagg Chapel, in order to keep students in school. When Eddy burned in 1925, African American laborers and businesses rebuilt the school at half price; the community bought seats and books, and raised $3000 for a sewage system and canning factory that were never installed.

Teachers’ salaries were lowered and Sallie Ellis Davis donated her entire salary for a year. Due to expenses, the Eddy School was transferred to the white Board of Education as a public school.
Life After Eddy

After the second fire in 1947, 150,000 bricks slated to rebuild the school were stolen. The site then sat vacant for several years before being turned in to a bus depot and then later abandoned. Carver School accepted many students from Eddy and carried on its legacy.

Carver had been a high school housed in an old Baptist College, but after a fire at that site, was rebuilt as a school for African American students. Over its lifetime, Carver served as a high school and elementary school.

Carver High School was demolished during the summer of 2018. The site is currently vacant and for sale. Courtesy of Sallie Ellis Davis archives, GCSU.