

Bethinking of 2-28-85 Old Orleans

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BOOKER T. WASHINGTON
IN ALBION — AT THE
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

"In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."

Booker T. Washington

Many notable Americans have passed through Orleans County over the years. With February being Black History Month it is an appropriate time to look back to when the great black educator and social reformer Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) visited in Albion. It was Friday evening, June 20, 1914 that he spoke to a large audience in the Pullman Memorial Universalist Church. His address was entitled "The Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute." He was very warmly received and his remarks were listened to with intense interest.

It is not surprising that Booker T. Washington spoke where he did. During the early years of this century the Pullman Memorial Church hosted many lecture programs and even sponsored a Shakespeare Club of the church. Another notable American who spoke there was Elbert Hubbard, craft revivalist and author of "A Message to Garcia." In fact, a large social room in the church was known for many years as the lecture room. Universalists were also early supporters of the anti-slave movement in the 1830's.

Booker T. Washington was born on a plantation near Roanoke, Va. in 1856 where his mother worked as a cook. After the Civil War he moved to Malden, W. Va. where he went to school and worked in the salt furnaces and coal mines. Between 1872-1875 he studied at Hampton Institute and Industrial School in Virginia. He then returned to Malden where he taught school for two years. He also briefly attended Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C. and in 1879 joined Gen. Samuel C. Armstrong's staff at Hampton Institute. In 1881 Armstrong chose Washington to head a newly-formed school at Tuskegee, Alabama. From the simple beginning of himself as the teacher with fifty students in an old church, Tuskegee Normal grew to be one of the world's leading centers of black education. Booker T. Washington's leadership continued there until his death in 1915. The Tuskegee library includes a special collection pertaining to blacks, and it has various facilities that compile and disseminate information on the economic, educational and social aspects of black life. The George Washington Carver Museum named for the distinguished scientist who worked at Tuskegee is also located there.

Booker T. Washington encouraged cooperation between the races and urged blacks to improve themselves through self help by gaining an education. In 1900 he founded the National Negro Business League which reflected his emphasis on skill, thrift and enterprise. He worked to uplift the economic development of blacks through his great wisdom and acumen. He recognized the great predicament of blacks in his day and age and strove for reconciliation between blacks and whites, especially in the south.

Here are some brief excerpts from Booker T. Washington's address of June 20, 1914 at the Pullman Memorial Church: "We are now beginning to experience in a very effective manner throughout the south some results of education. The results are being felt in the life of both races. In a word, education is being applied to the human interests and activities of all the people in a way not to be discounted. There are many difficulties yet to be overcome....The great and fundamental problems of life require time and patience for solution but just so long as we are sure that we are working in right directions, let us have courage and go forward...There is much work ahead both in bettering education, moral and religious conditions and in changing hostile public sentiment."