

As a matter of public interest, and at the request of the County Superintendent, we publish the following correspondence:

Office of Supt. of Public Instruction,
MONTGOMERY, ALA., June 3d, '69.

H. S. WHITFIELD, Esq., County Supt., &c.

DEAR SIR:—Upon examining your account, find that you have reported 44 white schools, and only 2 colored, which is not in accordance with the school Laws of the State, and can't be allowed without an explanation, as there are 2664 colored children in your County. We hope, therefore, you will come here and make such explanation as will be satisfactory in the premises.

Very Respectfully,
Your Obt. Servant,
N. B. CLOUD,
Supt. Public Instruction.

TUSKALOOSA, JUNE 10TH, 1869.

DR. N. B. CLOUD—Sir: I have received your letter of the 3d, notifying me that the school money is withheld from this County, because schools for colored children have not been established in the country Townships. I regret that this notice was not given two months ago. The explanation is simple and apparent, and the failure should not be charged against me or the Township Trustees.

I have found it impossible to contract for schools, either for whites or blacks, solely upon the public credit. This County has many unsettled claims of a date prior to the inauguration of the new system, and several thousand dollars of back dues. A universal distrust is the consequence. I have established but two schools in the County where the teachers relied exclusively on your department for their pay. In every other instance, the teachers and patrons were well acquainted, and contracts were made, with the understanding, that, if the school fund failed to pay, the patrons would do it.—Such contracts could not be made with teachers of colored schools, for the negroes are wholly irresponsible, and, if the public money failed, the labor would be lost.

I have tried, and, to my knowledge, Trustees have tried to organize colored schools, without success. It is impossible to do it without first knowing how much money each Township will receive. In the case of the white schools, this difficulty was easily surmounted, for, teachers could safely charge their patrons for services rendered after the public money was exhausted. Again, suppose the amount known, the teacher before contracting for a colored school, must have confidence in the good faith of the Educational Bureau. This latter difficulty was not, perhaps, felt in Montgomery County and other Counties close around you. But here it was, and is, in the way.

Now, I have just recently received from you the apportionment of the money to the Townships of this County, and it is not half what I was led to expect it would be. Instead of about ten thousand dollars, heretofore received from the 16th Section Fund, we get only about thirty-three hundred. I supposed, from what I learned in your office, last December, that our County would receive about double its former amount, or twenty thousand dollars. It turns out only nine thousand. Now if I had, on the first information, blindly contracted with teachers of colored schools—luckily I could not get them—how could I extricate myself from the consequent embarrassment of having pledged the payment of twice as much money as the appropriation, just now made known to me?

You will observe, by reference to my reports, that more than two-thirds of the entire colored population of this County, are massed in six Townships. In one of these, I have organized two colored schools. In the others, I have had no schools, either white or colored. These are T. 21, R. 9—T. 21, R. 10—T. 21, R. 11—T. 22, R. 11—T. 24, R. 4—and T. 24, R. 5. The remaining thirty-one Townships have an average colored enumeration of thirty, and an average appropriation of \$190, for the scholastic year. The average white enumeration for the same is about one hundred and twenty-five. A fair division between white and colored would give about thirty six dollars a year to the latter. The whites have already their houses, built and owned by them, for school houses. The population being very much diffused in these Townships, it would require at least two school houses and two teachers to give all the colored children anything like a fair chance. You assign me \$36 to build these two houses, and employ these two teachers, and then withhold the money, because I have not already built the houses and employed the teachers without it.

A word of explanation now in regard to the six Townships, alluded to, where the blacks are in great numbers, and where, with one exception, there have been no schools, black or white. It has been my intention, so soon as your Bureau furnished me information of the sums appropriated to them, as an indispensable basis for contracts for colored schools, to make an energetic effort to provide both houses and teachers for the blacks, and if possible, to organize schools for the 4th quarter, as that is the time when there will be the least demand upon the children for farm labor. Simultaneously, however, with that information, which was absolutely necessary to the first step, comes the notification that the money is withheld. Why? Because I have not blindly blundered into contracts on the basis of rough guessing at amounts, and thus involved the school business of these Townships in a hopeless confusion.

In regard to the white schools organized, there is less difficulty. I have only to notify teachers of the time when the school fund of their Townships became exhausted, and they will charge their patrons from that day.

In my opinion, though it may be worthless, there is a radical defect (I am not punning) in our public school system. Nor do I imply that you are chargeable with it. You have done everything that any man could do to make it a success, but it will not succeed until that defect is remedied. It seems to me, to use a vulgar expression, that we are "going it blind." We are certainly a little too fast. The remedy will be found, I think, in the entire suspension, throughout the State, for twelve months, of all public schools, and all public school offices, except that of the State Superintendent.

The money for each scholastic year would then be collected in advance. The State Superintendent could make the apportionment of the whole fund, and, by the 1st of September, notify all County Superintendents and Trustees, of the sums assigned to the Townships. With this certain information as a basis, there would be no difficulty in making contracts and no confusion in settling them up. The check to the progress of education, incurred by this intermission, would have its compensation in the certainty and regularity with which the system would operate in the future.

I repeat, in conclusion, that in the great majority of Townships, the fund is too small to accomplish anything for the blacks; that, as to the others, you have stopped me just at the time, when it became possible to make an attempt with any hope of success. Where schools are dependent solely on the public pay, they must be limited to one quarter, and, in some cases, to one month. One Township in this County gets only \$21, and others, like insignificant sums. The 4th quarter is, then, the appropriate period for colored schools, as it is the time when the labor of the children can be most easily dispensed with. You will observe that many of the Townships had no schools in the first quarter. Others lacked them in the second, while some have notified me that the need of labor is so pressing they could not send until the fourth.

The blow, which this action has struck, in this County, at the already wavering faith in the public pay, falls with pointed effect on the two credulous teachers who were induced, in the outset, to take charge of colored schools, as it would be absurd for them to appeal to their patrons for pay.

If you inquire into this matter when you come to the meeting of the Regents, at the close of this month, you will find it about as I have stated.

In the hope that this explanation may satisfy you, I remain,

Your obedient Servant,
H. S. WHITFIELD,
Superintendent Tuskaloosa County.