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JOSEPH L. WILEY: A BLACK FLORIDA EDUCATOR

by JOE M. RICHARDSON

“**W**HAT has become of Prof. Wiley,” asked the *Ocala Evening Star* on September 6, 1915.¹ Joseph L. Wiley, longtime principal of Fessenden Academy at Martin, had mysteriously disappeared on July 1 while in Ocala to attend a movie. He had parked his car on West Broadway and walked to the Temple Theater downtown. The next morning his car was still there, but Wiley was never seen again. His financial affairs were in order, he had drawn no money from the bank, and his family and possessions remained behind. Rumors abounded as to his whereabouts. Many local blacks believed that he had been murdered. An acquaintance, writing years later, recalled that gossip at the time hinted that the slender, light-skinned, straight-haired teacher may have decided to leave the area and pass as white somewhere else. But, she added, “I have never been sure that he was not merely taken to a swamp or out to sea.”² Whether Wiley simply had disappeared or had been killed, Fessenden Academy and the community had lost a prominent leader and educator.

The school began in 1868 when Thomas B. Ward and local blacks built a log cabin and hired a teacher to instruct the freedmen in the community. “The first course of study was Webster’s blue-back speller, the primer and the hickory rod. Few even

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1. Fessenden Academy records prior to 1919 were destroyed by fire. Although it is possible to piece together Wiley’s career at Fessenden from other sources, the complete story will never be known. J. A. Buggs to P. M. Widenhouse, June 18, 1951, John A. Buggs Papers, box 2, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans (hereinafter, ARC).
2. *Ocala Evening Star*, September 6, 1915; Central Florida Community College, *The Struggle For Survival: A Partial History of the Negroes of Marion County, 1865 to 1976* (Ocala, 1977), 40; Lura Beam, *He Called Them By the Lightning: A Teacher’s Odyssey in the Negro South, 1908-1919* (Indianapolis, 1967), 89.



The faculty of Fessenden Academy in front of the school, c. 1914. Joseph Wiley is in the middle of the back row. *Photograph courtesy Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana.*

mastered these except the rod in the early days.”³ Since local school officials had limited interest in educating black youths, the school had changed little when Ferdinand S. Fessenden first saw it in 1890. Fessenden, a wealthy Bostonian, was staying in Martin, Florida, eight miles north of Ocala in December 1889 for his health. While strolling one day, Fessenden visited the school and was shocked at the condition of the rude “tumbledown cabin” and the seventy-five students. He was pained by the school’s meager furnishings and by the “mis-directed energy of the teacher whose discipline consisted of a

3. Eloise Robinson Ott and Louis Hickman Chazal, *Ocali Country, Kingdom of the Sun: A History of Marion County, Florida* (Ocala, 1966), 91; Central Florida Community College, *Struggle for Survival*, 40; *American Missionary* 64 (September 1910), 387.

plentiful supply of hickory whips.” Fessenden agreed to build and furnish a two-story, fifty-by-fifty-foot school building equipped with four “elegant airy recitation rooms,” good desks, maps, and books.⁴ On October 1, 1891, Fessenden led the procession of the students from the log cabin to the new structure. Two years later he deeded the school, now named Union, to the American Missionary Association (AMA).⁵ Initially, Fessenden had intended to transfer the school to Marion County officials, but he had found among them “such a divergence of sentiment and such low views of education” for blacks that he concluded to entrust his property to the AMA, which was known for its work in black education in the South. Fessenden also gave the association “an extensive orange grove well-loaded with fruit” that he hoped would help pay teachers’ salaries, but within a year it had been destroyed by bad weather. After the historic February 8, 1895, hard freeze, it was reported, the groves in Marion County “looked as though a terrible plague had swept through them.”⁶

The AMA staffed the school with two, occasionally three, teachers and instructed up to 140 students a year, but it was not until Joseph L. Wiley became principal in 1898 that the school really began to prosper. Wiley, described by an AMA official as Caucasian in appearance, was born in Woodbury, Tennessee. He apparently attended public schools there and around 1890 enrolled at Fisk University where he was an active and popular student. As editor-in-chief of the school paper, the *Fisk Herald*, he complimented Booker T. Washington who had recently assured Fisk students that he favored college training and that the country needed more colleges as well as industrial schools.⁷ Wiley was senior class historian in 1895 and delivered the commencement oration, “Origin and Evolution of Civilization,” that

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4. Fred L. Brownlee, *New Day Ascending* (Boston, 1946), 141; A. F. Beard to Miss Bridgeman, November 14, 1922, A. F. Beard Papers, ARC; *American Missionary* 57 (April 1903), 102-04; 77 (October 1923), 354; *Fisk Herald* 18 (April 1901), 1-2.
 5. *American Missionary* 87 (March 1933), 272.
 6. Beard to Bridgeman, November 14; American Missionary Association (AMA), Executive Committee Minutes, March 13, 1893, American Missionary Association Archives (AMAA), addendum, ARC; *American Missionary* 87 (March 1933), 272; Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 154.
 7. AMA, Teacher’s Records, n.d., AMAA, addendum, ARC; *Fisk Herald* 12 (April 1895), 9.

same year. The speech was given in Wiley's "characteristic animated oratorical style." Upon graduating with a degree in classics, Wiley announced that he would spend the summer "teaching and rustivating in the rock ribbed hills and lovely valleys of Cannon County," Tennessee.⁸ While teaching, Wiley studied law, and in 1896 he was admitted to the Tennessee bar. After two years practicing law he "became convinced that he could do more good as a Christian teacher" and accepted an AMA commission as principal of Union School. The AMA renamed the school Fessenden Academy in 1900.⁹

Wiley arrived in Martin with his wife, Josephine Hobbs Wiley, an 1893 Fisk graduate, determined to improve the school. His task would not be easy. The AMA was closing many of its schools in order to conserve money. Fessenden, far from the association's New York headquarters, was seldom visited by officials, and it was considered less important than schools in urban areas that attracted larger numbers of students and more public attention. But the aggressive, energetic Wiley was undeterred. Within two years, with the help of his wife, who was depicted as "brisk, competent," and a "very good" teacher, he had increased the teaching staff to four and was instructing 238 students. Wiley, characterized by an AMA official as a diplomat and politician, was also receiving favorable attention from whites in the community. In early 1901 he gave an address to a black farmer's convention in Ocala, which the *Ocala Weekly Star* hailed as the speech of the day. Wiley urged his audience to be good citizens—thrifty, industrious, temperate—and to practice scientific farming. He advised them to stay on the land, "for if you go to the city, as a rule, your sons and daughters get into the evil ways of the idle and vicious." Not surprisingly, the address pleased the whites who heard or read about it. In an article entitled "A Worthy Educator," the *Star* proclaimed Wiley to be the right man in the right place and a credit to his profession and race.¹⁰

8. *Fisk Herald* 12 (June 1895), 7-10, 12.

9. The Union School was not renamed Fessenden Academy until after Fessenden's death in 1899. *American Missionary* 66 (April 1912), 31; 63 (February 1909), 44; *Fisk University News* 12 (April 1922), 30; *Who's Who of the Colored Race* (Chicago, 1915; reprint ed., Detroit, 1976), 283.

10. *Fifty-Fifth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association*. . . . (New York, 1901), 63, 96; AMA, Teacher's Record, n.d., AMAA, ARC; *Ocala*

Wiley continued to improve the school. By 1903 his staff numbered six teachers, and he had added two years of secondary training, the only area school to offer more than eight grades to black children.¹¹ The first class to complete the tenth grade was composed of five young women, all of whom had passed the state teacher's examination and were teaching in county schools in 1903. At first Fessenden attracted primarily local black children, but, as it added higher grades, students began to come from greater distances. In 1903 Fessenden had an enrollment of 250 with at least fifty pupils boarding in cabins surrounding the school. Wiley had built a small men's dormitory on campus and in 1904 began construction of a women's dorm. According to the AMA, Wiley was "conducting building operations of considerable importance without drawing upon the treasury of the Association." He had also added thirty-seven acres of land to the campus.¹² Wiley had unusual success in soliciting funds for his small, rural school.

The irrepressible Wiley was not content with his gains. His greatest building success came in 1907-1908 when he secured a \$6,500 grant from Andrew Carnegie. With an additional \$1,500 in gifts, Wiley was able to finance the construction of a building that included a library, accommodations for female boarders, a large dining hall, and classrooms for domestic science courses. The building, designed by a black architect retained by the AMA, was constructed entirely by black labor.¹³ When Wiley became principal in 1898 the Fessenden plant was valued at \$6,000; by 1912 it was appraised at \$30,000. Half a dozen build-

Weekly Star quoted in *American Missionary* 55 (April 1901), 110; *Ocala Star* quoted in *Fisk Herald* 19 (March 1902), 14.

11. The Marion County superintendent claimed that Howard Academy in Ocala was offering ten grades by 1904. *Bi-ennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1902-04*, 324. Most sources indicate that Fessenden was the only school in the area offering secondary education for blacks for several years. See U.S. Office of Education, *Negro Education: A Study of Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*, 1916, bulletin, no. 39 (Washington, 1917), 162, 165-69.
12. *American Missionary* 57 (April 1903), 103-04; 58 (December 1904), 324-26; 59 (December 1905), 305; *Fifty Seventh Annual Report of the AMA*. . . (New York, 1903), 55, 60.
13. U.S. Office of Education, *Negro Education*, 173; H. Paul Douglass to J. W. Cooper, December, n.d., 1908, Beam-Douglass Papers, ARC; *American Missionary* 61 (October 1907), 236; 62 (November 1908), 288; H. Paul Douglass, *Christian Reconstruction in the South* (Boston, 1909), 38-39.

ings had been added, most of them partially built by students, and the campus had increased from ten to 200 acres. Most of the plant improvement had been accomplished by the principal. The AMA paid teachers' salaries but gave little more than its moral support to the building program. Wiley's success, however, slightly loosened the association's purse strings. In 1910 it appropriated \$1,800 for an addition to a building, \$600 for a water system and plumbing for the girls' dormitory, \$100 for moving and equipping a blacksmith shop, \$200 for fencing and equipment, and \$300 for painting and sundry repairs—a total of \$3,000.¹⁴

Despite his emphasis on constructing buildings, Wiley did not neglect academics. In December 1908 members of the Marion County Board of Public Instruction visited Fessenden at Wiley's invitation and found it "in most excellent condition and doing splendid work." The board commended Principal Wiley "for his untiring work and splendid success" and enthusiastically recommended Fessenden to Florida's black students. The board further stated that "in its opinion it was the best colored school" in the state. By 1910 the school had a staff of eleven and more than 300 students, of whom forty-five were boarders. Six of the teachers were college graduates. Fessenden had added a four-year normal course from which sixteen men and women had graduated as teachers. Many others who had not received diplomas were also teaching in country schools. By 1912 at least a thousand students had attended the school, "carrying the leaven of their education and training; high ideas, and Christian influence."¹⁵

From the time Wiley arrived in Martin he began to cultivate good relations with the community—black and white—and with county school officials. Generally he succeeded. Local blacks sent their children to Fessenden, made donations to the school, cooperated in building campaigns, sought advice from Wiley, and assisted in plant construction. True, a few people referred to Wiley as "a white man's man," but he was popular in the black

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14. AMA, Executive Committee Minutes, July 12, 1910, AMAA, addendum, ARC; *American Missionary* 64 (November 1910), 531; 66 (April 1912), 32.
 15. Broward Lovell, *Gone With the Hickory Stick: School Days in Marion County, 1845-1960* (Ocala, 1975), 70; *Sixty-Fourth Annual Report of the AMA*. . . . (New York, 1910), 42; *American Missionary* 64 (September 1910), 387-88; 66 (April 1912), 32.

community. Many whites seemed pleased with the suave principal. By 1907 it was stated that "the white people of this part of Florida who may have had doubts as to the wisdom of Negro education have become firm friends of Fessenden Academy." When a former Fessenden student was murdered in 1909, Wiley was summoned to join the posse to catch the killers. He "counselled . . . the dignity and majesty of the law in the minds of those who had just cause for righteous retribution." Wiley's standing with whites was reflected in P. H. Nugent's letter to the *Ocala Banner* supporting a restriction on voting. "This law is so worded," Nugent wrote, "that it does cut out colored men from voting, and it cuts out every wandering temporary turpentine worker and sawmill hand who is colored, . . . but it does not cut out . . . Prof. Wiley and other colored men of intelligence and property." The *Ocala Evening Star* called Wiley "a very intelligent man, well educated, and with a great amount of tact; a quality much needed in the position."¹⁶

Wiley maintained good relations with county school officials, especially during the administrations of superintendents W. D. Carn and J. H. Brinson (the latter who became state superintendent of Negro education). He also corresponded with state superintendents of public instruction William N. Sheats and William M. Holloway. The AMA had not gotten off to a very good start with the county. Secretary Augustus F. Beard visited the school in 1897 and invited the county superintendent to address the students in the assembly room, which had large engravings of Lincoln and Washington on the wall. The superintendent told the students that they were fine pictures but that there should be one of the man who had done far more for them than Washington and Lincoln. "Children, you all know whom I mean," the superintendent said, "tell me his name." Much to his chagrin the children answered in unison, "John Brown." Although there is no evidence that the superintendent was permanently angry, greater cooperation awaited Wiley's arrival.¹⁷

In 1902 County Superintendent W. D. Carn applied for Peabody funds for Fessenden Academy, and State Superintendent

16. AMA, Teacher's Record, n.d., AMAA, ARC; *American Missionary* 61 (October 1907), 236; 63 (August 1909), 516-17; *Ocala Banner*, May 28, 1915; *Ocala Evening Star*, September 6, 1915.

17. *American Missionary* 51 (April 1897), 120.

William N. Sheats endorsed the application. "So far as I can judge from reports," Sheats wrote, "and from my acquaintance with the Principal Wiley, this is one of the best and most progressively administered colored schools in the state."¹⁸ In 1903 the Florida legislature enacted a law providing state supplements to high schools in order to encourage their development. Although the State Board of Education announced that pupils enrolled in private and sectarian schools were ineligible for such aid and that aid could be granted to "no school unless the building in which the school is taught is owned by the school authorities in fee simple," Carn asked for state assistance for Fessenden. Sheats informed Carn that state aid had been approved for Fessenden but added, "I am doubtful whether it is constitutional or not. We will have to place the blame on your Board this time if any trouble arises." Sheats wrote Wiley that he believed "that you will use the state aid allowed you to the very best advantage."¹⁹ Fessenden Academy received \$360 in state money in 1904 and continued to receive small state supplements through 1908.²⁰ County officials regularly inspected the school and occasionally provided financial assistance for students studying to be teachers. The *Ocala Evening Star* claimed that it was a tribute to Wiley that the board cooperated with Fessenden as long as he was principal. The board withdrew support after his disappearance.²¹

Perhaps Wiley was accepted by whites because he was intelligent, energetic, and diplomatic, but also because of what he taught his students. The *Star* claimed that Wiley had instructed his students on how to use their hands as well as their heads and how to get along with white people. Although he emphasized academic instruction, Wiley supported industrial training. There were 22,000 black farmers living in Marion County in 1910. In 1902 the John F. Slater Fund offered Fessenden Academy \$600 to establish an industrial department if it would

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18. W. N. Sheats to J. L. M. Curry, January 23, 1902, Sheats to J. L. Wiley, February 4, 1902, Superintendent of Public Instruction Letterbook, record group 402, series 244, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereinafter, SPIL, FSA).
 19. Sheats to W. D. Carn, January 14, 26, 1904, Sheats to Wiley, January 24, 1904, SPIL, FSA.
 20. *Bi-ennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1903-1904*, 119; *Bi-ennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1907-1908*, 363.
 21. *Ocala Evening Star*, September 6, 1915.



Up-to-date plowing at Fessenden Academy, c. 1911. *Photograph courtesy Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana.*

permit the county board to supervise the work, and Wiley agreed. The board would enclose thirty-seven acres and employ a teacher “who understands agriculture, carpentry, blacksmithing, cooking, sewing and housework.”²²

Practical industrial training was offered in agriculture, carpentry, and sewing. Students helped build most of the structures on campus, constructing some of the smaller ones completely. They also grew most of the food that was served in the dining room. In 1908 students cultivated one-half acre of turnips, beets, cabbages, and other vegetables for their own meals. In addition they planted a field of oats, fed twenty-five pigs, cared for the other farm animals, and harvested 150 bushels of sweet potatoes. In 1912 State Superintendent Brinson reported that Fessenden Academy was “doing a splendid work for negro youth.” Especially encouraging, he thought, was the mechanical and agricultural activity. The female students concentrated on sewing, food preservation, and housework. In 1912 Fessenden won \$99.75 in premiums on the livestock, sewing, and ironwork displayed at the county fair. Two years later the *Ocala Daily Banner* complimented Fessenden on its exhibits at the Marion

22. *Ibid.*; Bureau of Census, *Negro Population 1790-1915* (Washington, 1918), 645, 678, 708; Lovell, *Gone With the Hickory Stick*, 61-62.

and Sumter county fairs. "We do not believe," the *Banner* proclaimed, "the exhibits can be excelled by the colored people of any section of our country." Fessenden's display filled one-half of a building and showed "finished work that carpenters, blacksmiths, seamstresses and cooks recognize as the standard of perfection." The sewing was "elaborate," the carpentry exhibit "exhaustive and excellent," and the ironwork "very noticeable." The *Banner* was also impressed with the well-written, well-chosen, "splendid academic papers."²³

Despite some notable success in industrial training, Wiley always emphasized that the academic program must come first. He was not a Booker T. Washington disciple. He encouraged industrial education because the school was in a rural area, student gardeners reduced the cost of feeding pupils, and to curry favor with county and state school officials. County superintendents Carn and Brinson pushed industrial education for black children as did state superintendents Sheats and Holloway. In 1903 Sheats wrote Wiley that he would be wise "to substitute 'industrial work' for Latin," as "the knowledge of how to do something would be worth more to the colored race just now than a smattering" of a foreign language.²⁴ Wiley advocated the AMA policy that industrial education was not an end, but a means to an end. The aim was to make "men" rather than mechanics, "to make a carpenter a man, not simply make a man a carpenter." One of Wiley's favorite students was James Sistrunk, who was "almost grown" when he enrolled in 1902. Sistrunk was assigned to haul water and clear rocks from school property with an ox sled. One day he was "fearfully gored" by one of the animals and was rushed to a doctor who advised the young man to withdraw from school. Sistrunk stayed on, however, and became the outstanding student of his class, president of the Y.M.C.A. and the Beard Literary Society, and winner of a gold medal for his eloquent graduating speech. In 1914 Sistrunk was a carpenter, owner of a tailor shop, a "director of boys, a leader and a MAN."²⁵ According to Wiley, Fessenden

23. H. Paul Douglass, Report on Fessenden, December, n.d., 1908, Beam-Douglass Papers, ARC; *American Missionary* 61 (June 1907), 184; *Bi-ennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1910-1912*, 112; *American Missionary* 67 (April 1913), 33; *Ocala Daily Banner* quoted in *American Missionary* 69 (January 1915), 580-81.

24. Sheats to Wiley, October 21, 1903, SPIL, FSA.

25. *American Missionary* 68 (July 1914), 216-17.

Academy gave special attention “to intelligent knowledge of studies pursued, good reading, good writing and accurate spelling.” It was only after the successful completion of these requirements that the school offered practical training. Knowledge of good grammar and participation in the literary society were more significant than knowing the proper technique of weeding the garden or squaring a board, Wiley announced. He believed the school had to produce leaders for the black community.²⁶

More important to Wiley than industrial training was to teach “correct living.” Most of the students, Wiley said, were from “cabin homes” and needed “new ideas and new views of life,” which, to him, meant they must learn to “conquer acquired habits of unthrift and carelessness—the battle—to be renewed day by day . . . for tidiness, for politeness, for thoughtfulness, for clean rooms and clean bodies, and clean minds and clean hearts and clean yards and everything clean.”²⁷ Wiley used the daily morning devotional period to impress upon students the necessity of good manners and morals. Teaching geometry, chemistry, or languages was almost futile, Wiley stated, if students were untrained in Christian character. Although he advocated no denomination, Wiley encouraged regular church attendance. Fessenden had weekly prayer meetings, a Sunday school, and an organization to “develop the powers of the young people to lead Christian meetings and to follow close to Christ.” The Young Women’s Christian Association and the Y.M.C.A. met on campus every Sunday.²⁸

Wiley’s view of “correct living” included temperance. In the early 1900s his students helped defeat a local option campaign. According to an AMA official, the “saloon party” enfranchised many Marion County blacks by paying their poll tax, but “the influence of Fessenden Academy carried its precinct for no license.” The Women’s Christian Temperance Union frequently held medal contests at Fessenden where students orated against liquor. In 1915 Wiley prefaced the presentation of awards “with a most excellent temperance address to his people which will be

26. *Ibid.* 64 (September 1910), 387; 65 (December 1911), 528; 68 (July 1914), 216-17; 61 (June 1907), 184.

27. *Ibid.* 68 (July 1914), 217.

28. *Ibid.* 61 (June 1907), 183; 68 (July 1914), 217; 57 (April 1903), 103; 69 (May 1915), 97-98.

long remembered by them."²⁹ Intoxicants, snuff, tobacco, fire-arms, and profanity were prohibited on campus. The emphasis on Christian living did not mean that students were not allowed to have fun; games, recreation, and socials were encouraged. Just prior to Christmas in 1913 Santa Claus suddenly appeared on campus in traditional garb. The students roared welcome. The boys ran to the barn, fetched the red buggy, and pushed Santa all about campus. Students and teachers received presents, sang Christmas songs, made speeches, and performed "the march." Mixed dancing was not permitted on campus, but the march allowed the students—men in one line, women in another—to move in time to the music.³⁰

Wiley also insisted upon patriotism at his school. AMA pupils were taught to honor the flag even though, as he saw it, it had failed to protect them. Wiley urged students to prove to the world Lincoln's wisdom that blacks were more valuable as citizens than as slaves. The exchange of the cabin for the cottage, virtue for vice, ignorance for intelligence, and the "full development of strong racial characteristics that live in the heights of integrity and industry will continue to show that children of former slaves, freed by Lincoln are worthy of his deeds and all they cost." He asked students to remember that the United States was their home and country. "If it seems that there are conditions oppressing you . . . laws that are passed to humiliate you, to discourage you," Wiley added, "do not desert the flag; do not question the Constitution. They are right; stand for them and the time will surely come when every man and every woman will be accorded every right." The United States, Wiley declared, had a "glorious opportunity to teach the world a lesson in brotherhood." Blacks should "live and achieve" so that the country might become better, become a haven for other oppressed people.³¹

Although Wiley was overburdened as principal, teacher, business manager, and farm supervisor, he did not neglect the

29. *Ocala Banner*, April 16, 1915.

30. Douglass, *Christian Reconstruction*, 38; *Ocala Banner*, April 16, 1915; *American Missionary* 68 (February 1914), 676.

31. *American Missionary* 62 (December 1908), 305-06; Joseph L. Wiley, "Sidelights From the Life of Abraham Lincoln," *American Missionary* 63 (February 1909), 45; 66 (April 1912), 32.

community. He constantly spoke at churches, schools, and farm conventions. He led the fight against legal liquor in his precinct, worked for better public schools, and joined with Ocala black businessmen in creating the Metropolitan Savings Bank with a capital stock of \$25,000 in 1913. George Giles was president, and Wiley was first vice-president of the bank. He was widely respected by both black and white residents.³² Yet all was not well with Wiley. For the last several years he had been feuding with his staff and occasionally with AMA officers. One AMA official called him “a terror on teachers.” The teachers were young and “not so earnest in the work as he, and he drives them hard and without sympathy.” In 1908 Wiley wanted to curtail Christmas vacation to three days including Saturday; the teachers wanted more time. Wiley believed that educating his pupils was more important than vacation time, and he demanded that all staff be on duty. The teachers appealed to the AMA, and a bitter quarrel ensued. Wiley insisted that the staff be well educated, absolutely committed to the work, energetic, and pliable. When they failed to meet his standards he fired them, and this often brought him into conflict with the AMA, which did most of the hiring.³³

Dictatorial principals were common in the AMA and in other schools, and Wiley easily survived the teacher unrest, but he came into conflict with a man as stubborn, strong willed, and dictatorial as he, and unfortunately that man was his superior in the AMA. The association generally allowed its principals little latitude. Orders were issued in New York and were expected to be obeyed in the field. Every expenditure, even to building an outdoor toilet, had to be approved at the home office. Since Wiley was able and innovative and since Florida was so far away and rarely visited by officials, he had been an exception. The AMA let him go his own way as long as he did not acquire debts. Indeed, AMA officers were impressed with his initiative and Fessenden’s constant growth; that is, until H. Paul Douglass assumed supervision of AMA schools in 1906.

Initially the two men got along well, but by 1908 Douglass had decided that Wiley followed his own inclinations too much

32. *Who’s Who of the Colored Race*, 283; Federal Writer’s Project, Florida, “Negro History in Florida,” typescript, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville: *Crisis* 7 (December 1913), 65.

33. AMA, Teacher’s Record, n.d., AMAA, addendum, ARC; Douglass, Report on Fessenden, December, n.d., 1908.

and Douglass's orders too little. For example, Wiley had a new well dug for the school without permission, and the AMA had to pay the bill. It was needed, but the principal had not asked for approval. Wiley was not accused of being wasteful. He had a good bookkeeping system. "The only looseness," Douglass wrote, "is that Wiley gets things out of his own pocket, which we do not want him to do, expecting to charge them later if [the school] has enough money, otherwise to assume them himself." Quite often Wiley spent much of his own money on Fessenden. Douglass admitted that Wiley was a successful principal; his influence on students was excellent. Although Wiley's manner was often stiff and formal, he was more relaxed with students, even occasionally displaying a sense of humor. Once, during an especially dry spring, students asked him what they should plant in the garden. He suggested alternate rows of onions and potatoes so that the onions might get in the eyes of the potatoes and thus cause "tears" enough to water the crops. His daily chapel services were impressive and edifying. He met often with students trying to satisfy both their personal and academic needs. Moreover, Douglass said, "his hold on the white people of the county is undoubtedly remarkable. He gets public money, furnishings and other favors." Still Douglass was agitated at Wiley's independence. It seemed that neither man was willing to compromise. In exasperation Douglass wrote, "In brief I expect history to repeat itself. Wiley will add to the plant, involving us more or less but getting the greater proportion of money elsewhere." Wiley, he concluded, was "incurable."³⁴

The two men continued their angry feud until Wiley disappeared in 1915. AMA records suggest that Douglass had asked for Wiley's resignation in 1913, but he refused to resign and was still present at Fessenden's commencement two years later.³⁵ Apparently, the faculty and his family were unaware of Wiley's imminent departure. Perhaps, Wiley was so humiliated at attempts to force him out of the school he had directed for so

34. Douglass, Report on Fessenden, December, n.d., 1908; *American Missionary* 65 (September 1911), 325; H. Paul Douglass to J. W. Cooper, January 16, 1909, Beam-Douglass Papers, ARC.

35. Wiley's teacher's record indicates that he was asked to resign in 1913 and that he vanished July 1, 1915. The record apparently was completed years later. It also indicates that he had gone to Fessenden in 1893, although he did not go until 1898. The accuracy of the record is questionable. AMA, Teacher's Record, AMAA, addendum, ARC.

many years that he simply chose to disappear. Perhaps, he decided to pass for white or, more likely, met with foul play.³⁶ Fessenden faltered for a time after Wiley disappeared, but it recovered and continued to offer opportunities to black youth until it closed its doors in 1951.

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36. In September 1915 an Ocala black businessman received a letter from Mrs. Wiley in Nashville. She had heard nothing of her husband and was in "great distress at his prolonged absence." In 1922 the *Fisk University News* located Mrs. Wiley in Chicago. It listed Wiley as "address and occupation unknown." In 1938 AMA Executive Secretary Fred L. Brownlee said Wiley disappeared, and no one ever knew what became of him. *Ocala Evening Star*, September 6, 1915; *Fisk University News* 12 (April 1922), 42; Fred L. Brownlee, *A Continuing Service* (New York, 1938), 23.