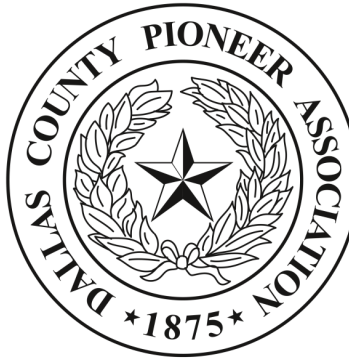
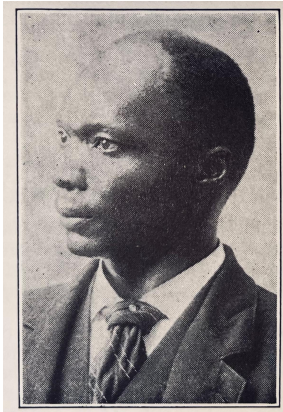




John Wesley Ray, Educator



By Mike Judd

Born in Asheville, North Carolina on February 24, 1852, J.W. Ray spent his youth working as a teamster loading and unloading barges on the docks of the French Broad River. The end of the Civil War and emancipation found him in Maryville, Tennessee where he entered Maryville College and earned a B.A. degree in Education. Ray taught school in Eastern Tennessee and Virginia for several years before relocating to western boom town Dallas in late 1878 seeking new opportunities.

In the years before the 1884 creation of the Dallas Public Schools, Ray organized private schools in Plano, Jefferson, White Rock, and in Dallas. The private school he founded in Dallas was located at the Boll Street C. M. E. Church. When Dallas' public schools launched in Fall 1884, Ray was elected the principal of the city's first black school located at the old City Hospital on South Lamar which had been vacated. In 1888, the city built a permanent two-story school on the corner of Canton and Cockrell Streets named simply, "Negro School #1". Ray and his three teachers taught all grades and all subjects and graduated their first class of three students on June 3, 1892.

On March 3, 1881 Ray married Mary L. Crockett in Dallas where the couple raised three children – Pearl, John H., and Sina Christine. On June 14, 1892, the school board approved the creation of a separate "Dallas High School For Negroes" but did not select J. W. Ray as the new school's principal. Located on Hall Street north of Ross Avenue, it was replaced in 1921 by Booker T. Washington High School on Flora Street. Ray remained a Dallas educator and died here on June 12, 1929 at the age of seventy-seven. He is buried in Woodland Cemetery in South Dallas.

In 1938, the Dallas Public Schools opened the new J.W. Ray Elementary School at 2211 Caddo Street in memory of the city's first black principal. In 1991, Dallas Parks and Recreation dedicated J.W. Ray Park at 2010 N. Washington near his former home. Although the DISD closed J.W. Ray Elementary in 2021 due to falling attendance, the park remains a popular neighborhood gathering spot.

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