



Mary McLeod Bethune

July 10, 1875 - May 18, 1955

Daytona Beach, Florida

Mary McLeod Bethune died in Daytona Beach, Florida, on May 18, 1955. She was seventy-nine. Born in Mayesville, South Carolina, on July 10, 1875, the fifteenth of seventeen children, she started a school for Black girls in 1904 with almost nothing - crates for desks, a dollar and a half, and a faith that literacy was a form of citizenship - and built it into Bethune-Cookman College.

She advised Franklin Roosevelt as a member of the unofficial Black Cabinet, led the National Council of Negro Women, and treated a walking stick and a string of pearls as working clothes. She could raise money in a drawing room and discipline a campus before breakfast. Daytona Beach was the campus and the last house; the desk is still shown as if she had just stepped out to meet a trustee.

She wrote a last will that left ideals rather than property: love, hope, the trained mind. The college still carries the hyphenated name. She is buried on the campus, not in Mayesville. The schoolhouse of 1904 is the beginning this page will not let the later titles erase.

She sat at tables where she was the only woman and the only Black person and took notes as if that were ordinary. The college hymn still sounds like a school that remembers being a cottage. Daytona Beach buried her on the grounds she had walked into existence. Mayesville was the cotton field that taught her the price of a book. She left a last will that listed love and hope as if they were deeds to file. The campus grave is a few steps from the classrooms that began as a cottage and a dollar and a half.

Services

Died in Daytona Beach on May 18, 1955. Interment on the Bethune-Cookman University campus.

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