

Gregory Normal Institute ^[1]

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By Michael Hill, 1987

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The New England-based American Missionary Association (AMA) was founded in 1846 by the Congregational Church and was dedicated to promoting antislavery feeling North and South. Among its early leaders were Lewis Tappan and George Whipple. In the postwar era the AMA became the most active and successful of the many benevolent societies helping former slaves adjust to life as freedmen. The group's particular emphasis during Reconstruction was on the establishment of schools and churches for blacks in the South.

The first AMA-sponsored day schools for North Carolina freedmen opened in two New Bern churches in July 1863, followed soon thereafter by ones in Morehead City, Washington, Plymouth, and on Roanoke Island. Sites increased rapidly after the close of the war. By 1865, in Wilmington alone, eight teachers were holding schools in four churches, with up to 300 students in each school. In 1868 these classes were combined in a new building erected with funds from the AMA and from a Mr. Williston of Northampton, Massachusetts. In years thereafter, the school was known by several names, variously Williston Academy, Wilmington Normal School, and New Hampshire Memorial Institute. It was renamed in 1883 to honor a second benefactor, James J. H. Gregory of Marblehead, Massachusetts, who paid for the enlargement of the earlier frame building, a new three-story brick teachers's home, and a brick church.

AMA schools helped form the basis for the public school system in North Carolina. The AMA and the Wilmington School Board joined forces in 1869. However, as late as 1908, the AMA still provided most of the annual expenses of \$5,000 for Gregory Normal Institute. In that year Gregory had 281 students and ten teachers. Classes were held at the original site until 1921. Today an elementary public school a few blocks away is known as the Gregory School. The original classroom building and teachers' home have been demolished. The church remains active as Gregory Congregational.

References:

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Origin - location:

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