



## NEW JERSEY STATE ARCHIVES COLLECTION GUIDE

**Record Group:** Department of Education  
**Subgroup:** Manual Training and Industrial School for Colored Youth at Bordentown, NJ  
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### Institutional History

For sixty years, the Manual Training and Industrial School for Colored Youth in Bordentown served as New Jersey's state-operated, co-educational vocational school for African Americans. The Bordentown school was originally established in 1886 by Rev. W. A. Rice, a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, as a private institution under the name of "The Ironsides Normal School." To put into effect federal and state legislation relating to industrial education and manual training schools enacted as early as 1874, the New Jersey legislature designated the Bordentown school as the state's manual training institution by a legislative act passed 25 May 1894 (Laws of 1894, chapter 349). Two years later, in 1896, to accommodate construction of new facilities the state leased the Parnell estate on the outskirts of Bordentown, overlooking the Delaware River. (This land was purchased by the state in 1901.) With acquisition of several additional properties from 1916 to 1926, the 400-acre Bordentown campus eventually included two working farms and over thirty trade, academic, and residential buildings.

With the 1894 act, management of the school was initially vested in a special board of trustees consisting of state and county government officials (including the governor, the state superintendent of public instruction, the senate president and assembly speaker, the president of the state agricultural college, and members of the State Board of Education). In October 1903, the State Board of Education was given direct responsibility for the school's operation, which it then administered through a special committee (Laws of 1903, Second Special Session, chapter 1, article XXI). Expenditures on physical plant, appointment of principals and staff, and the curriculum were all subject to the approval of the state board.

With many of its staff residing on campus, the Bordentown Manual Training School formed a self-contained community in which students and faculty lived and worked together. In order to graduate, a student was required to complete the academic curriculum and to master a particular trade. Students and staff together operated the entire school plant, which provided both classroom experience and apprenticeships for future occupations. Contemporary surveys show that a high proportion of graduates became gainfully employed in the trade for which they had trained at Bordentown--even during the years of the Great Depression.

Following the adoption of the new state constitution in 1947, and in the climate of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education*, the New Jersey State Board of Education attempted to integrate the Bordentown school. Renamed as "Manual Training and Industrial School for Youth," the school was opened in 1948 to all students regardless of race. The recruiting effort failed, however, and on the basis that the school was segregated in its practical operation, the State Board of Education adopted a resolution in December 1954 closing the institution the following June.

## **Bibliography**

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Baker, Douglas T. "Manual Training and Industrial School for Colored Youth, Bordentown, New Jersey" [unpublished paper]. (1973).

Segear, J. E. "Legislation, Historical Data and State Board Rules and Regulations Pertaining to the State of New Jersey Manual Training School at Bordentown" (1953).

Baker and Segear items in Box 4 – Correspondence, File “Board of Education Regulations and Legislative History of School.”

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