

Telling Our Stories

The Freedman's Commission and the Founding of St. Augustine's School

1865-1877

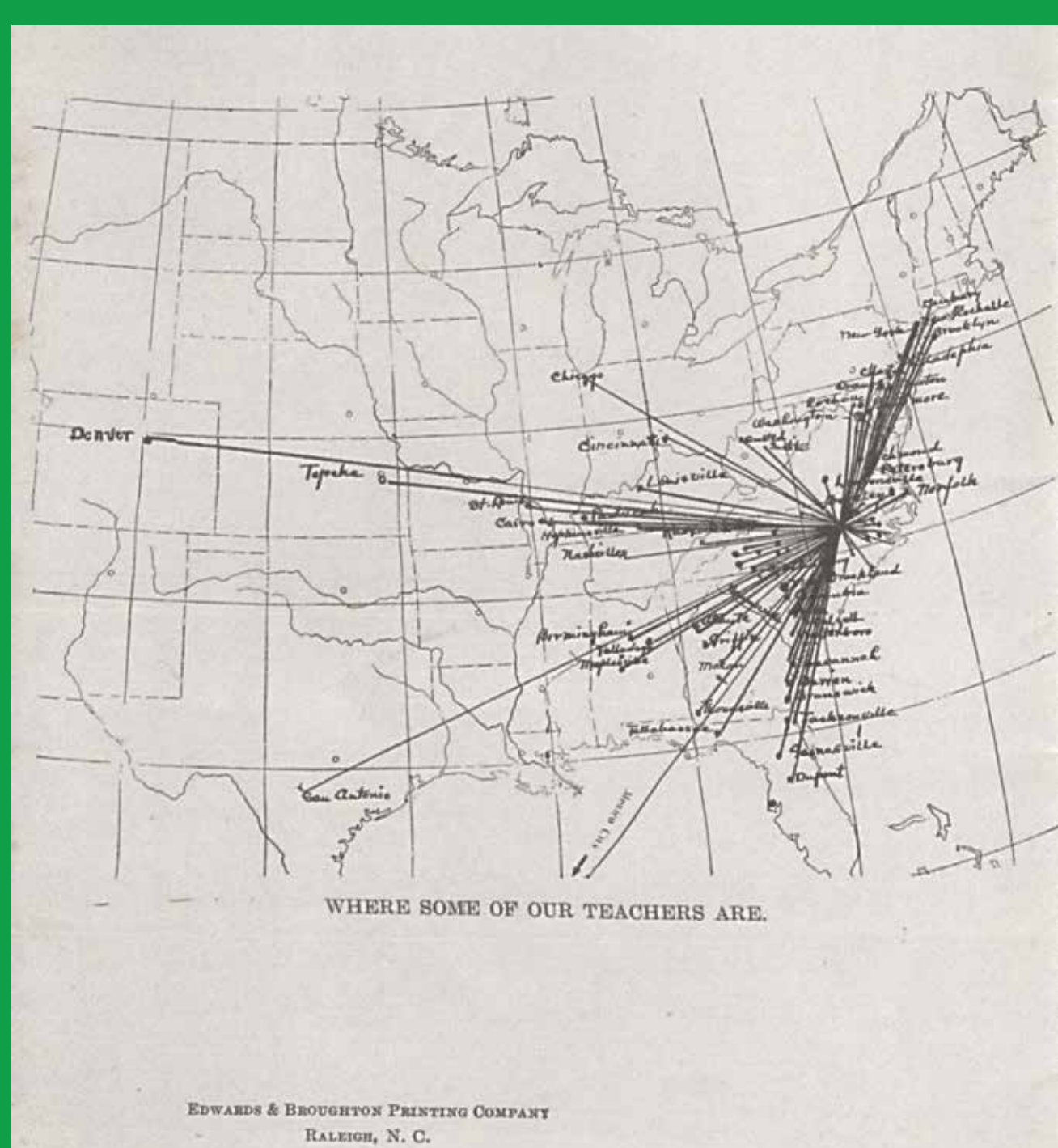
The Civil War brought defeat to the Confederacy and emancipation to enslaved people. The Episcopal Church responded by creating the Freedman's Commission, a new third branch of the Domestic & Foreign Missionary Society. The primary purpose was to send teachers to the South to open schools for the newly emancipated. The Freedman's Commission operated for 12 years, from 1865 to 1877.

Here in North Carolina, with Bishop Atkinson's enthusiastic support, Freedman's Commission schools were started in New Bern, Wilmington, Raleigh, Fayetteville and Asheville. The schools were highly successful in attracting students, and, in conjunction with them, Black congregations formed soon after: St. Cyprian's, New Bern; St. Mark's, Wilmington; St. Joseph's, Fayetteville; St. Augustine's (later renamed St. Ambrose), Raleigh; and St. Matthias', Asheville.



St. Ambrose, Raleigh, from *The Carolina Churchman*, October 1916

St. Augustine's School



This map, circa 1917, illustrates the national impact of graduates from St. Augustine's (above, 1899).

But the most significant development was the 1867 founding of St. Augustine's School in Raleigh as a teacher-training institution where promising Black students would be taught to become teachers themselves. St. Augustine's was a cooperative effort of the Freedman's Commission, the Diocese and the Federal Freedmen's Bureau. In addition to training teachers, it was also a training school for Black clergy.

Within a few years of its founding, St. Augustine's boasted an impressive curriculum and an expanding student enrollment. Several of the students were encouraged to stay on at St. Augustine's as faculty instructors, including Annie Haywood, who married fellow student and aspiring minister, George Cooper. Dr. Anna Julia Haywood Cooper would go on to become a prominent educator and author, earning a doctorate from the Sorbonne.

Blessed Anna Julia Haywood Cooper (1858-1964), educator and advocate

Born enslaved in the Raleigh household of George W. Haywood, 9-year-old Anna Julia enrolled in the newly opened St. Augustine's School in 1868 and remained there for 14 years: first as a student and then as an instructor in classics, history, English and music. After her husband's death in 1879, she continued her education at Oberlin and returned to St. Augustine's as a faculty member in 1885.

In 1892, she published a book of essays entitled *A Voice from the South*, in which she advocated for the education of black women, and criticized the Episcopal Church for failing to accord African Americans sufficient respect. In 1925, she was awarded a doctorate from the Sorbonne, and she remained a prominent educator and school administrator in Washington, D.C. into her 90s. At her death at the age of 105 in 1964, a memorial service was held at St. Augustine's Chapel, and she was buried alongside her husband in the Raleigh city cemetery. Her feast day in the Calendar of Saints is February 28.



Dr. Anna Julia Haywood Cooper

