

## **Alice Sturdivant Williams**

Alice (S.) Sturdivant Williams of Mobile Al, was a devoted mother and wife of Dr. Henry Garret (H.G.) Williams, Sr. Alice was a local school teacher in the old "Colored or Negro City" School system. Alice worked at Old No. 5 on North Coyle St. in the 1925-26 school year. In 1929-30, Alice became the principal of this elementary school and taught Grade 1. Alice was on staff at Washington High School in 1938. She was pictured as the "class sponsor" of that graduating class when Dr. Vernon McDaniel was the principal.

Alice and Dr. H.G. Williams had two children: a little boy, Henry Garret, Jr. and a little girl, Dorothy Williams Steen. Mrs. Steen was my 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science Teacher and former, librarian of Booker T. Washington Jr. High in 1959 on "A" and Strong St. In 1916, Dr. Williams and Alice moved to 510 North DeVilliers St. and ran the Pensacola Drug Company which was formerly located at Palafox and Gregory St. in downtown Pensacola. This pharmacy moved to 500 North DeVilliers St. near by due to the Jim Crow Laws.

Dr. Williams died in 1925 while in 1929, Alice moved to 422 N. "C" St. near the Ella Jordan Home. Dr. H.G. Williams apprenticed many local Black Doctors in the early 1900s. These were: Dr. James Polkinghorn, Sr., Dr. J. Lee Pickens and Dr. A.S. Magee. All of the Williams family members are deceased now. Dr. Williams is buried at the St. John's Cemetery. Alice passed in 1941.

In 1952, after the death of Mrs. Alice S. Williams, the City of Pensacola name the first Black city-owned Community Branch Library in her honor at Gonzalez and "E" St: The Alice S. Williams Branch Library. Alice had a long teaching career and was active in many local black organizations. This author believed that Mrs. Williams was active in the Federated Colored Women's Clubs at 423 N. "C" St. in Pensacola.

The Williams ' Branch library was the "only" public library that young Black Children and their parents could use from the 1950s-1970s until integration allowed African Americans to use the county library system (See Florid Library History Project attached).

### **References:**

Images in Black, compiled by Ora Wills and Mamie Hixson. 2006. African American Heritage Society.

The History of the Colored or Negro City Public Schools of Pensacola from 1886-2008, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Dr. Marion Williams, Author.

References:

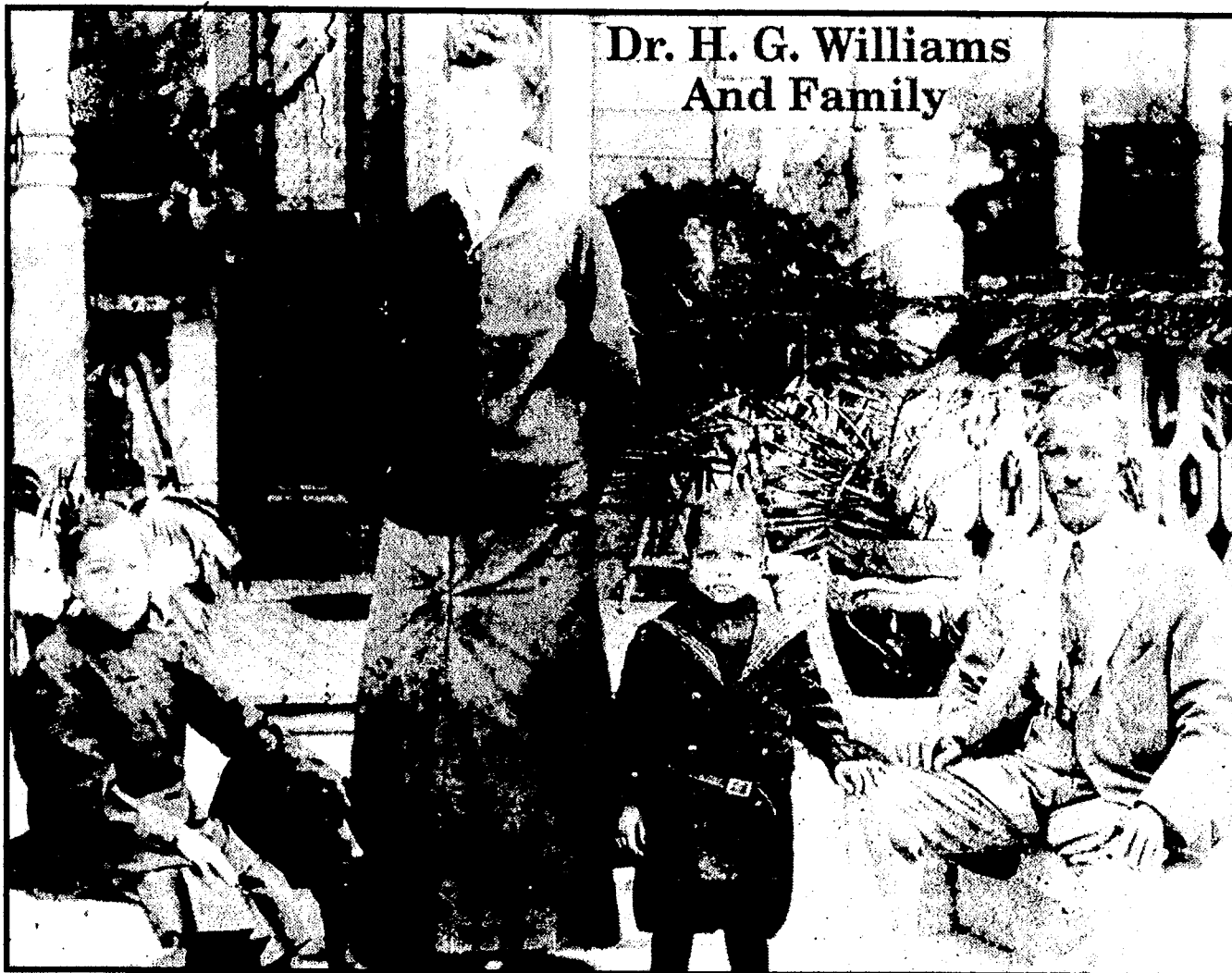
West Florida Regional Library: Florida Library History Project. Page 3-August 17, 1952. Alice S. Williams Branch Library opened for the Black Community.

Interviews: John Jerralds, ret. Former City Councilman, City of Pensacola, July 30, 2020; Ms. Ora Wills, author and poet, retired teacher; and Mrs. Robin Reshard, local historian – July 30, 2020.

March 1, 1938	Pensacola Free Public Library counted 2,375 cardholders.
August 17, 1952	Alice S. Williams Branch Library opened to serve the Black community.
1957	New Pensacola Public Library opened at Spring and Gregory Street.
1963	Santa Rosa entered into inter-local agreement with City of Pensacola, with service to 1800 patrons at the Milton Branch Library. Beginning of the West Florida Regional Library System.
1963	First Bookmobile began operation, shared by Pensacola and Santa Rosa County.
December 1964	Pensacola City Council voted to extend service to the rest of Escambia County through inter-local agreement with the County. City approved addition to the Pensacola Public Library.
April 1965	Larger Bookmobile began service to Escambia County.
April 1967	Addition to Pensacola Public Library completed.
1971	Santa Rosa opened branch in Gulf Breeze.
1972	Outreach Van begins serving low-income areas.
1973	Friends of the Pensacola Public Library established.

**From the Caribbean Island of Jamaica, East Indians in Pensacola**

Alice Sturdivant Williams, wife of Dr. H. G. Williams, was born in Mobile in 1880. She died in Pensacola in 1941 according to her tombstone inscription. Alice S. Williams Library (present-day Alice S. Williams Day Care Center) bears her name.



Dr. Henry Garret Williams, M.A., M.D., with son Henry Garret Williams, Jr. touching his knee. Sitting is daughter Dorothy, and standing is his wife Alice. All members of Williams family are deceased. On Dr. Williams' tombstone in St. John's Cemetery is the following inscription: *He was a musician, teacher and physician born in Jamaica, British West Indies in 1865, died in Pensacola, Fla. 1925. His degrees, M.A. and M.D., are also listed.* Dorothy Williams Steen was a former Washington High School librarian.<sup>60</sup>

Reprinted with Permission AAHS, 2019

# **Florida Library History Project**

## **West Florida Regional Library**

- 1885                      The Pensacola Library Association organized as a subscription library. One hundred eighty-four members paid twenty-five cents per month to use the library.
- 1904, 1910, 1911, 1919      Attempts made to secure Carnegie funds for a public library. However, the City failed to provide a site and a promise of future support for such a library, so that funds were not obtained. The City later allotted \$25 per month, and then \$50 per month. The library moved to various locations downtown and at some point a bond election failed.
- 1933                      The subscription library closed and its books stored in the San Carlos Hotel.
- February 1937              Pensacola City Council passed ordinance to establish a free public library and created a five-member board.
- January 1938              Lucia Tryon hired as Librarian to organize and open library.
- February 15, 1938              Pensacola Free Public Library opened in Old Christ Church with 3,352 books, including those from the old subscription library and a hundred dollars' worth of new ones.
- 1938                      The Shakespeare Club opened a library on Oak Street in Milton

# Negro Library Nears Completion

By CURT HUNT

The new Alice S. Williams Library is nearing completion and officially will be opened to the Negro public shortly.

The library, four years in the building, is located on the southwest corner of Gonzalez and E Streets.

City Librarian Lucia Tryon said the library was to have been completed by July 4, 1950, but, due to various reasons, work was held up.

A Negro committee formed to begin work on getting the new library consisted of the following members: Solomon Brookins, John Ross, Clarence Benboe, and the Rev. O. E. Schavers.

The committee agreed to do all the work on the library if the city would help get the materials.

The city at first turned over to the committee a building and \$800 for repairs, but the committee decided that the building was beyond repair.

The city then gave a lot on which to build a new building, and the committee began an intensive program of canvassing the Negro people of Escambia County.

They called for volunteer labor from the carpentry, masonry, plumbing, and electrical fields. They staged a "Tile Rally" that



**OPENING SOON**—The Alice S. Williams Library for Negroes is in the final stages of construction and will open to the public in the near future. The building is located on the southwest corner of Gonzalez and E Streets. The library, four years in the building process, is named for the teacher, Alice Williams, who taught thousands of students at Washington High School. It is to be a branch of the Pensacola public library.

was successful in getting most of the tile needed for the building.

For four years the library has been in the city budget. One City Council allotted \$2,000 toward its completion.

The city has been buying books all along and now has 2,000 books catalogued and ready to go into the shelves.

John Ross, general chairman of the present committee, said the committee worked until it had exhausted every source of aid.

City Council and ask for help in finishing it up," he added.

Ross said it had been a "mighty

big job" getting the Negro people to see just how important a library was to the community because it never had had one before.

"Any number of people have come to me over the past years asking me questions," he said. "I just let them use my own home library and they got their answers that way."

Now that they realize how important it is, Ross added, they want a library very much. The spirit they have shown is proof of how badly they want it," he said.

The present City Council, when

it began the year's business in 1951, decided to work \$8,000 into the budget to complete construction.

Work has been stepped up and the building is nearly complete. The shelves are to be installed, the grounds finished, and a few other little jobs are to be done.

Ross remarked with a smile that he would be glad to see it finished for two reasons: First, the people can start using the library and enjoying its benefits.

Second, as he said it, "It will certainly be a big off my shoulders that I've carried for four years."

Lucia Tryon says that as general chairman John Ross has done s

**Soaking Diapers?**

**REACH FOR THE Pine-Sol**

Put little in water. Cleans cleaner, faster—disinfects as it cleans. Deodorizes... removes stains. Non-scent, non-caustic.

Sal  
On

H  
T. 1  
22.4  
Mor  
year  
Thu  
Cl  
case  
the  
Ji  
tend  
non  
trou  
that  
The  
of  
mar  
T  
that  
cha  
nee  
and  
be t  
back  
awf  
with  
he

T  
with  
time  
that  
trio  
can  
L. F  
vest  
said  
com  
har  
alor  
A  
sent  
rest  
mad

10

**Aug. 17, 1952**

Alice S. Williams Branch Library opens to serve the black community.

**1976**

Alice S. Williams Branch Library closes and merges with Pensacola Public Library.