



Wilberforce University

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

Wilberforce University is the oldest private historically black university in the United States. It was established in 1856 by the Cincinnati, Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church to provide classical education and teacher training for African-Americans. Situated in southwest Ohio, outside Xenia, the area surrounding the campus had a large population of white abolitionists and free blacks. The first Board of Trustees was comprised of individuals of both races, including Ohio Governor Salmon P. Chase and Bishop Daniel A. Payne. Over 200 students were enrolled by 1860. Enrollment numbers decreased in 1862 as a result of the Civil War, and the university closed until 1863. Over the years, it has received financial support from both the federal and state government levels. It has served as a hub for African-American cultural and intellectual life in southwestern Ohio, providing education for future leaders in a variety of occupations, from teachers to doctors to politicians.

Important Dates

- 1856: Wilberforce University is established in southwest Ohio and holds its first classes.
- 1858: Reverend Richard S. Rust is selected as the university's first president.
- 1862: The university closes temporarily due to financial issues.
- 1863: The African Methodist Episcopal Church purchases and reopens the college.
- 1865: An arson fire damages several campus buildings. Repairs funds are furnished by private supporters and the U.S. government.
- 1888: As part of an agreement with the Ohio state legislature, the university offers an industrial education program, bringing substantial state-provided financial support and political patronage.
- 1891: Payne Theological Seminary is established at Wilberforce.
- 1909: A Carnegie Library is built with matching funds from the Carnegie Foundation.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Search the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), in proximity or as phrases: Wilberforce University, Wilberforce College, seminary, fire, industrial, Methodist, degree, Ohio.
- Limit your search by date to find information about specific events.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- "[Wilberforce University](#)" *Holmes County Republican* (Millersburg, OH), March 5, 1857, Image 4, col. 3.
- "[Burning of Wilberforce University](#)" *Xenia Sentinel* (Xenia, OH), April 21, 1865, Image 3, col. 4.
- "[Plea for Wilberforce University](#)" *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH), October 1, 1868, Image 3, col. 3.
- "[Wilberforce University](#)" *Appeal* (Saint Paul, MN), July 23, 1892, Image 2, col. 7.
- "[Wilberforce is Remembered](#)" *Seattle Republican* (Seattle, WA), March 4, 1904, Image 8, col. 2.
- "[Taft to Address Alumni](#)" *Wenatchee Daily World* (Wenatchee, WA), March 7, 1910, Image 3, col. 2.
- "[Leaves Large Estate](#)" *Caucasian* (Shreveport, LA), February 2, 1911, Image 2, col. 5.
- "[Disastrous Fire at Wilberforce](#)" *Broad Ax* (Salt Lake City, UT), December 17, 1921, Image 2, col. 3-5.