

Today in Columbus History:

On September 16, 1874, an article appeared in the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* under the title "Our Public Schools." It announced the opening of the new term and provided the number of students by race and gender. In total, 844 students were present. White students numbered 387 while "Colored" students numbered 457. It also mentioned that the schools opened earlier than the prior year and expected more children to enroll in the coming weeks.

Public schools did not exist in Columbus until after the Civil War. They were unheard of in Georgia and throughout the south, in general, before then. John McIlhenny suggested opening a public school in 1866 and the first one opened the next year. According to Etta Blanchard Worsley in her 1951 book "Columbus on the Chattahoochee," the schools in Columbus "became models for the rest of Georgia, and soon inquiries came in from the other cities."

McIlhenny was the inventor of a meter and also a Columbus alderman and mayor of the city after the war. Other city leaders supported McIlhenny's plan, including William L. Salisbury, another alderman who also sat on the board of trustees of the schools. He was a successful businessman who would go on to found the Merchants and Mechanics Bank and purchase the *Columbus Enquirer* newspaper.

At the time of this article, the city directory (1873-1874) showed three schools No. 1 for white males, No. 2 for white females and the mixed "colored" school at Temperance Hall. A historic marker at the location of Temperance Hall explains the early history of "The First Black School" that opened in 1872. There had also been a mixed public school for white children of both sexes near the Lowell Warehouse, down by the river. Apparently, it was gone before 1874.

The Claflin school for Black students was on land donated by the city in 1868 but built and operated by the Freedman's Bureau. It was not a part of the Columbus public school system. Funding for a Black school in Columbus came a few years later.

Although initially aimed at the poor, the public schools quickly became showpiece for the city. Wealthy citizens sent their children as well. Salisbury was not only a trustee of the school but his children attended. A few months prior to this article, the public schools held an exhibition that included, among other things, a performance by two of his sons.

The Sanborn Fire Map from 1885 shows the White male school on the corner of Jackson and Crawford (2nd Ave and 10th St.), the White female school on the corner of Forsyth and St. Clair (4th Ave. and 11th Street) and the Black school moved to the corner of McIntosh and St. Clair (6th Ave and 11 Street).

John McIlhenny relocated to Philadelphia where he died in 1916. However, his founding of the Columbus public schools was mentioned in his obituary.

Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

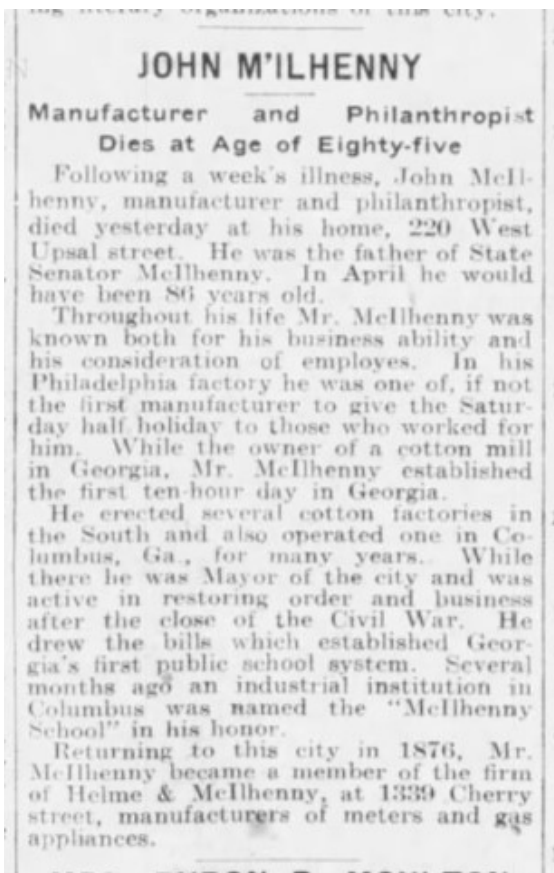
OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Total Number Attending 844. 40 More than Last Year --- Whites 387 --- Colored 457.

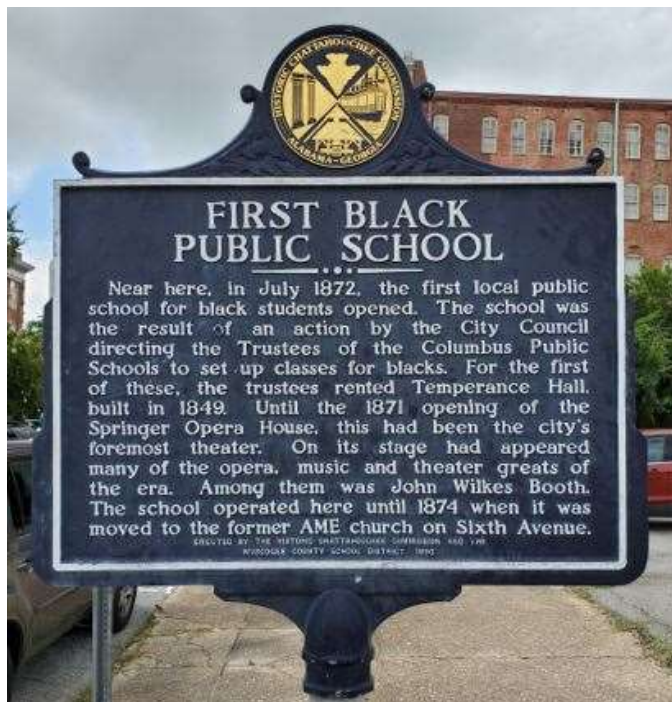
Yesterday the public schools of our city opened for the term under most flattering circumstances. The teachers had all returned, and were ready to begin their arduous labors during the coming nine months. This is fifteen days earlier than the time of opening on any previous year, which is the cause assigned for the decrease in the number of whites attending. By October 1st many more will come in.

On yesterday eight hundred and forty-four children were present.

September 16, 1874, an article appeared in the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* (GALILEO)



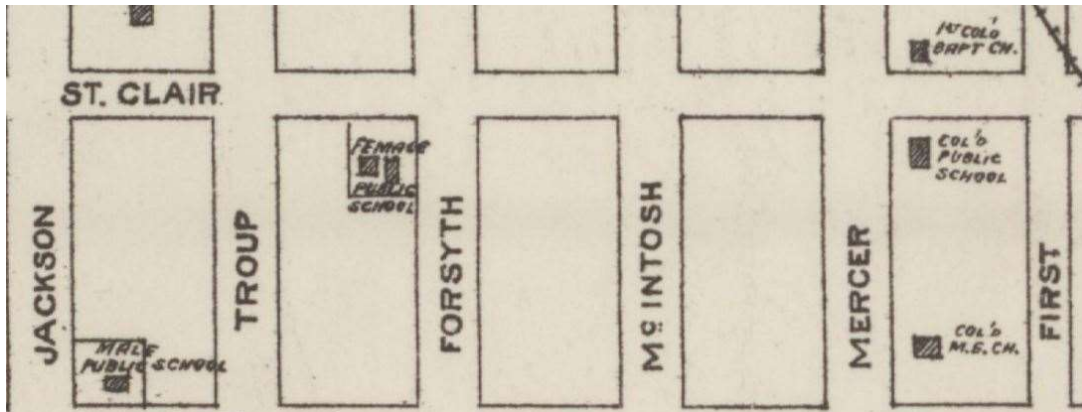
Feb 24, 1916 Phil Inquir McIlhenny obit



Historic marker near the site of Temperance Hall, Columbus, GA

PUBLIC SCHOOLS.
No. 1 (white male) northeast corner Jackson and Crawford streets. No. 2 (white female) southwest corner St. Clair and Forsyth streets.
Temperance Hall (mixed colored) Oglethorpe street, between Randolph and Bryan.

Haddock's 1873-1874 City Directory for Columbus, GA Digital Library of Georgia



1885 Sanborn Map Courtesy of the Library of Congress



John McIlhenny I, II and III, courtesy of the Columbus Museum