

Black History Month

Clifford Ellis

New Life Fellowship: Inman E. Page

### **Biographical Information**

Inman Edward Page was born a slave in Warrenton, Virginia on December 29, 1853, to Horace and Elizabeth Page. His obituary had the name of the slave owner as Fanshot. In late 1877, Horace Page made a compensation claim to the Federal government for losses during the American Civil War (1861-1865). In this report, his father reported his master as a man named Alexander Craig, who died in 1859. Thereafter his wife, Mrs. Craig, and the executor of their estate, William H. Gaines. As a slave, Horace hired himself out and was running a livery stable in Washington, DC before the start of the war and had business in Warrenton and in Fauquier County. He had many horses and other supplies taken by the Union Army during the war and provided some manual labor. He was able to buy his freedom with money from his business. He did not finish paying until after the Emancipation Proclamation but decided to pay the full agreed amount because the deal for his freedom was made before the war began. Horace and his family moved to Washington, D.C. in 1862. Inman attended the school of George F. T. Cook, brother of John F Cook Jr. He also took hired work to support his family, while attending night school taught by George Boyer Vashon. He then took work at Howard University, grading the campus grounds, to pay for his schooling. He was promoted to the janitor at the school. Oliver O. Howard was working to close the Freedmen's Bureau, of which Howard had been a part, Page was hired as one of Howard's clerks. In this way, he was a student at Howard until 1873.

In the fall of 1873, he and his friend George W. Milford became the first black students to enroll at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. The pair faced great discrimination, but at the end of his sophomore year, he won an oratorical contest which endeared him to his classmates. His popularity increased, and he was made class orator at the end of his senior year.

Page delivered the class-day speech on the "Intellectual Prospects of America" and among the audience was D.W. Phillips. Phillips offered Page a position at the Natchez Seminary in Natchez, Mississippi run by the American Baptist Home Mission Society. Page graduated from Brown in the fall of 1877 and moved to Natchez. In 1880, he received an M. A. (a master's degree) from Brown. Page was later awarded Honorary Degrees of Doctor of Law from Wilberforce University and from Howard University.

In the winter of 1877-1878, Page married Zelia R. Ball in Providence. Ball graduated in 1875 from Wilberforce University. They had three children, Zelia, Mary, and Inman E. Page, Jr. Page Jr. died at age seven. Zelia, later became a widely known music teacher and Mary married Nolan Pytle, a professor at Wilberforce University.

### **Achievement/ Contribution**

In 1878, Inman Page moved to Jefferson City, Missouri and took a position as a teacher at the Lincoln Institute. For his first two years at the Lincoln Institute, he was the only black regular teacher, but in 1880, the board of trustees decided to change strategies and have the school taught by black teachers and installed Page as school president. Page quickly began to grow the school. He increased enrollment from 97 to 153 in his first year, reduced student expenses, and secured appropriations from the state legislature to build two dormitories. One of the dormitories was for men and one for women; an increase in bi-annual state appropriations. In 1883, he was elected president of the Missouri State Teachers' association and was reelected to multiple successive terms.

In 1887, the university added college work to its curriculum and in 1891 it was designated a land-grant institution and embarked on additional building construction, and the school expanded again in 1895. One of the first professors Page hired was Josephine A. Silone, who arrived in 1881 and taught chemistry, public speaking, and English literature. Among the students, Page influenced at Lincoln were physicians William J. Thompkins, J. Edward Perry and Bishop William Tecumseh Vernon. In 1898, Page resigned from the presidency at the Lincoln Institute after facing political pressure to leave.

In 1898, Page was lured to Oklahoma Territory to become the president of the Colored Agricultural and Normal University in Langston, Oklahoma. The school became known as Langston University, and Page was its head for 18 years. At Langston, Page was a success as the student population, and the campus grew. However, Page did not avoid controversy. In 1903 Page was tried for incompetence and mismanagement and was completely exonerated. In 1906, Page was a delegate to the Oklahoma's state constitutional convention where his pretense was greeted with impolite sarcasm by convention president, white supremacist William H. Murray. Page, a lifelong Republican, was removed from the presidency by Democratic state politicians in 1916. He was replaced by Isaac McCutcheon for nine months and then by John Miller Marquess.

From 1916-1918, Page was president of the Colored Baptist College of Macon, Missouri, which was later known as Western Baptist College and moved to Kansas City, Missouri. He then moved to Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee to serve as its president.

Page's health failed, and he moved to Oklahoma City in 1920. In 1921 and 1922 he was supervising principal of the city's black elementary school and principal of Douglass High School. In 1922 he briefly returned to Lincoln Institute, then renamed Lincoln University of Missouri, when the board there pushed out then-president Richardson, but he resigned in August 1923 and returned to Douglass High School. He remained in Oklahoma City's public schools for the rest of his life. In June 1935 he retired with the honorary title of "Principal Emeritus".

### **Conclusion**

**Inman E. Page** (December 29, 1853 - December 21, 1935) was a Baptist leader and educator in Oklahoma and Missouri. He was president of four schools: the Lincoln Institute, Langston University, Western University, and Roger Williams University and principal of Douglass High School in Oklahoma City. He and George Milford were the first black students at Brown University.

**Reference(s):**

<http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/page-inman-edward-1853-1936>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40917800>

Leon Litwack and August Meier, eds., *Black Leaders of The Nineteenth Century*  
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