

# Education in Spring Hill-Sulphur Springs

Spring Hill, a community developed by African-Americans in 1911, is located on the northwest corner of Sulphur Springs. Education was critical in improving the social and economic conditions of Black Americans through racially oppressive times. The U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), legally enshrined the constitutionality of racial segregation laws, if facilities were deemed “separate but equal.” The law meant that Black children in Spring Hill were prohibited from attending the only school located in Sulphur Springs. Spring Hill Missionary Baptist Church, originally located on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (now known as Humphrey), became the original home of Spring Hill (Negro) School, until a permanent wood-framed school building was constructed in the 1920s. The first Black school in the community was built on 4<sup>th</sup> Street (now known as Okaloosa); it accepted non-white children from Spring Hill and other areas, and taught grades 1- 9.



Photo, Tampa Times, Dec. 17, 1940

## From Spring Hill to Dillard

Separate but equal laws claimed that Black and White people should live separate but equal lives. But while schools were separate, they were not equal in government funding and other characteristics. In 1948, the all-white Sulphur Springs School received \$932,000, almost 20 times more than the Spring Hill (Negro) School, which received \$50,000. Black citizens filed a federal lawsuit against Hillsborough County school officials, arguing for schools that were equal in all respects, including construction quality. Despite the significant differences in budgets, by 1950 Spring Hill School had experienced some changes. A new school was built at a new location, 602 Okaloosa, replacing the original Spring Hill School. Renamed Dillard Elementary, in honor of Rev. Henry Dillard of Spring Hill, it was also known as the “Brown Derby” by residents.



Sulphur Springs School (White only), 1948, Tampa Times

## Changing Times

The impact of oppressive segregation laws perpetrated racism for decades, until 1954, when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) won the U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Supreme Court ruled segregation unequal and unconstitutional, but it took many more years before children were fully integrated in local school systems around the United States. Dillard School was demolished in the late 1960s due to the construction of Interstate 275. The once all-white Sulphur Springs School, built in 1926, is now racially integrated and has received major upgrades. Today it is known as Sulphur Springs K-8 Community School.

## Educators and Advocators

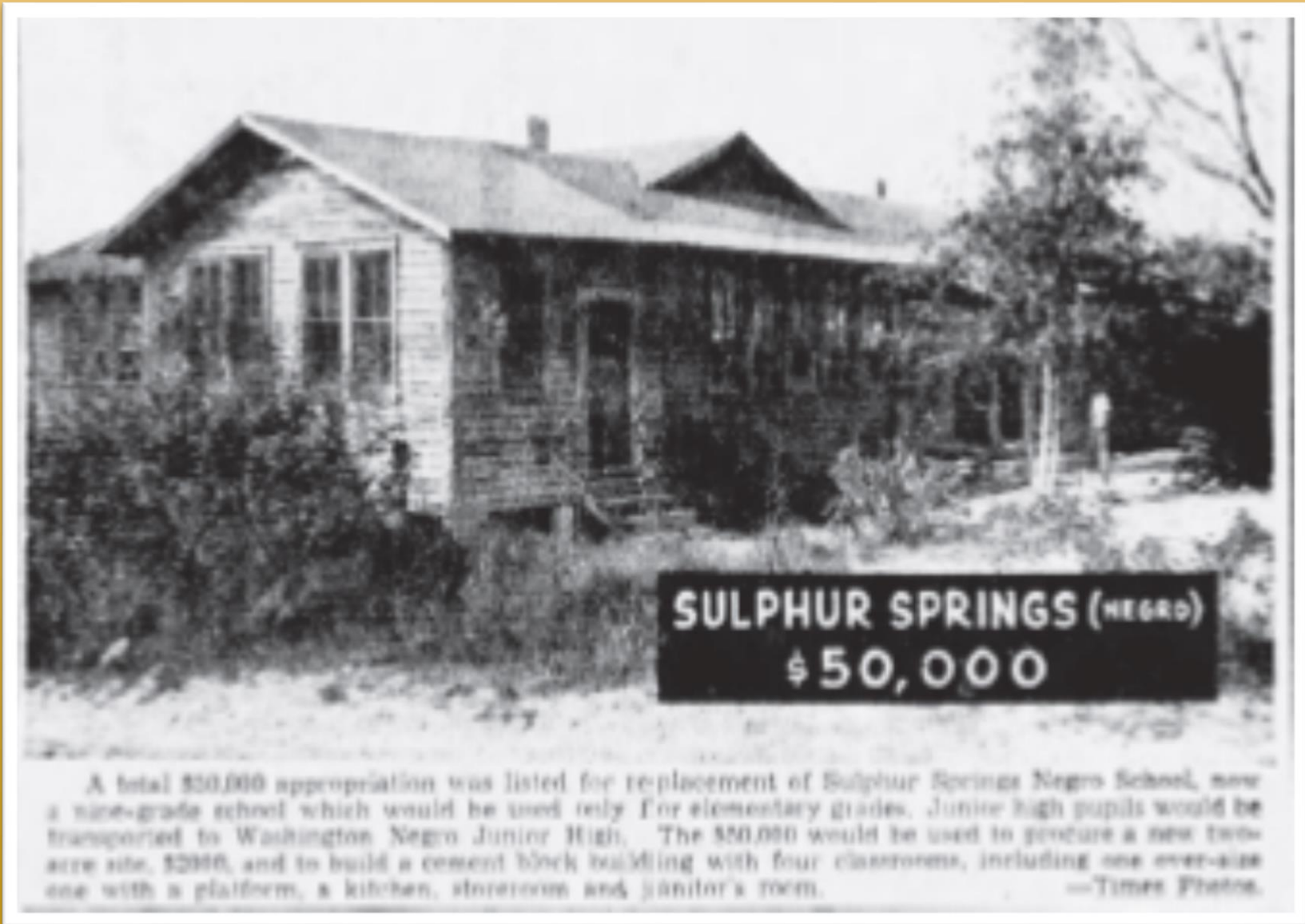
Kitty Varnes, a dedicated Spring Hill School teacher and alumna of Florida A & M College, was an advocate for her students. She learned that some could not bring lunch from home, and Spring Hill School had no kitchen. The *Tampa Times* reported in 1940 that Varnes gained national attention when she took her concerns and fundraising efforts to the radio airwaves. Her advocacy led to the construction of a school kitchen, with the guarantee of at least one meal for students. Her efforts to ensure that all children received a meal preceded the actions of government and local officials to address hunger.



Dillard School Graduating Class of 1960

**Top Row (l to r)** Mr. Fleming, Barbara Woods, Wanda Sims, Marilyn Whitehead, Carolyn Richardson, MaryAnn Stephen, Beatha Christian, Julia Ann Streeter, “Toti” Shephard, Mable Walker Principal; **2<sup>nd</sup> Row;** Teresa Gallman, Gabriel Hamilton, Diane Glymph, Carline Kinsey, James Anderson, Cynthia Dixon. Stedman Sandra, Johnnie Mae Powell, Michelle Randolph **Bottom Row;** Turner, James Taylor, Riley Lowetree, Edgar Allen, Wardell Evans, Pepe, Clarence Sheppard, Cornnel Sheppard

Information Courtesy Willie Streeter



Sulphur Springs School (Non-White), formerly Spring Hill School



Sulphur Springs K-8 Community School  
Photo by: Lisa Armstrong