

Emma Ernestine Edwards (1892-1991)

By Jerry Long
c.2026



Emma E. Edwards



(Miss) Emma Ernestine Edwards, the daughter of William Henry Edwards & Mary (“Molly”) Starks, was born 7 April 1892 in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. Miss Emma died 2 June 1991 at the Hillcrest Nursing Home in Owensboro, KY at the age of 99. She was a teacher for 50 years. She was reported to be a public school teacher in the 1920, 1930, 1940 and 1950 federal censuses of Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. In 1913 she began her teaching career at the Pleasant Ridge Colored School in the southern part of Daviess County, KY. She taught at the Western Colored School, in Owensboro from 1915 until she was transferred to the Paul Dunbar School (formerly the Eastern Colored School) in 1923. She taught at the Dunbar School until she retired in 1962. She succeeded W. H. Robinson as principal at the Dunbar School in Owensboro, in February 1938 and held that position until her retirement. She also served as president – administrator of the Mary Harding Nursing Home in Owensboro. 1939-1954. She was buried beside her parents and siblings at Elmwood Cemetery in Owensboro on 6 June 1991 (section E lot 110).

Emma Edwards’ father was a former slave. See article – “Black Kentucky Pioneers: William Henry Edwards (1857-1960), by Jerry Long, published in the Kentucky Pioneer Genealogy and Records, Vol. 7, Society of Kentucky Pioneers (Utica, KY: McDowell Publications, 1988) pp.101-104; Kentucky Family Records, Vol. 37, West-Central Kentucky

Family Research Association (Calhoun KY: 2013) pp. 20-23; and website [West-Central Kentucky History & Genealogy](https://wckhistory-genealogy.org/) (<https://wckhistory-genealogy.org/>).



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 5 June 1915, p.6:

The Owensboro Board of Education meeting of 4 June 1915:

The new teachers elected were Misses Isabel Hermon and Sallie Morton for the white schools and Mrs. Hattie Richardson and Emma Edwards for the colored.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 22 January 1923, p.2:



The opening of the Paul Dunbar school to the use of the Eastern Colored school this morning was the chief feature of the first day of the second term of the school year in Owensboro Public Schools.

Only four rooms are completed, the entire school being housed in these for the present at least. Twenty-five children and one teacher, Emma Edwards, was transferred from the Western Colored school, this making an enrollment of 170 pupils at this school with four teachers. All children from the sixth grade down living east of Allen street were transferred to the Paul Dunbar building.

The school, whose completion in February will mark a forward step in the board's building program, was planned to meet needs beyond the present time, so two rooms, which will later be used for teaching, will be taken for community reading room and manual training. Some time in February when the small assembly room and other parts of the building are finished, dedicatory exercises will be held by the colored people.

All of the teaching corps were on hand at the different buildings, and the enrollment following promotions went on without delaying the work. No reports were available this afternoon to show whether there was any increase in the enrollment. These will probably be made by the principals at their weekly conference with Superintendent Foust at 4 o'clock.

[ed. note – At a meeting of the Owensboro Board of Education on 24 June 1922 the name of the former Eastern Colored School on Jackson Street was changed to Paul Dunbar School. Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 25 June 1922, p.1B.]



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 8 April 1938, p.3:

**Crowded Conditions Exist
In Owensboro City Schools**

.... For March a year ago the percentage of attendance [at city schools] was 91.6. Dunbar school led with 95.3 percent. Emma Edwards has been principal of the Dunbar school since the last of February, when W. H. Robinson was moved to the Western colored school due to crowded conditions requiring another instructor....



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 2 November 1954, p.7:

**Emma Edwards Honored With Banquet In
Appreciation Of Harding Home Services**

Miss Emma Edwards, who has been president of the Mary home for the past 15 years, resigned this position after 15 years of service. Her resignation became effective Oct. 31. She will continue her services, however, the board meets and elects officers.

The home was organized in 1910 Mary Harding, for whom named. She was the first president; Rhea Thomeson, second president; Elsie Robinson, third president, and Miss Edwards, the fourth. Under her regime many improvements have been made and the home is now a clean, comfortable, livable place for aged Negroes. There, are now two men and six elderly women living 10 the home at 1314 West 7th street, where it was organized.

Due to the long care of the home and its people, in appreciation of her volunteer services, Miss Edwards was the honoree at a banquet at Dunbar school, 721 Jackson street, Monday evening, given by the Improvement club of the Mary Harding Home.

Speakers on the program were County Judge Norris Vincent, Mrs. Gertrude Weill, executive secretary of the Welfare League, C. D. Davidson, president of the Negro Chamber of Commerce, and Mrs. Queenella Sullenger, for the state Baptist missionary group, who paid tribute to the splendid work of the honoree. Music was provided by the Western High quartet, Mary Fisher Morris and Harry Fields, of the Western High faculty. Mrs. Mattie Coffey gave a reading, dedicated to Miss Edwards, who responded in a few words befitting the occasion.

The honoree was the recipient of a gift of appreciation from the Improvement club. Mrs. Rosa L. Green presented a "Name" cake the Improvement club. The tables were decorated in keeping with Halloween and harvest seasons.

The committee on arrangements included Mrs. Beverly Johnson, chairman, Mesdames Rosa L. Mildred Mason, and members of the Improvement club. Miss Edwards has been principal of the Dunbar for the last 30 years, and connected with the school system of Owensboro 42 years. She has taught every class from the first grade through, the 7th, and is now principal Dunbar school. Her early teaching years were at Western High school, where she was located for 12 years.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 21 March 1962, p.1B:

***Miss Emma Edwards Honored
As "Outstanding Teacher"***

Miss Emma Edwards, principal of Dunbar School, was honored Tuesday night at the "Outstanding Teacher of the Year" by the Owensboro Junior Woman's Club.

"Miss Emma," as she is affectionately known, is in her 50th year of teaching in the Owensboro School system. For the past 37 years she has been principal of Paul Dunbar School and has taught every class from the first through the seventh grades. In addition to her duties as principal at Dunbar, she teaches a sixth grade class.

During her early teaching years she was located at Western School.

Some of the organizations in which Miss Emma is active include membership in the National Education Association, Kentucky Education Association, Second Congressional District Association, Owensboro Teachers Association, Association for Childhood Education, Second District Teachers Association.

Miss Edwards is active in local civic organizations such as the Community Chest, Red Cross, Heart Association, TB Association, Easter Seal Drive, and headed the Negro Mother's March of Dimes for 10 years. She organized the first Negro Girl Scout troop in Owensboro.

She has been a member of the Fourth Street Baptist Church for the past 58. years and is a former organist and choir director at the church.

Since 1939, Miss Edwards has been associated with the Mary Harding Home and has been the business manager for the past 10 years. She was instrumental in the construction of the new addition to the nursing home. For 15 years she was president of the Mary Harding Home board and resigned from that position in 1954.

Miss Emma was educated at Chandler Normal School at Lexington, and Kentucky State College, Frankfort.



NAMED OUTSTANDING TEACHER - Miss Emma Edwards, right, principal of Dunbar School, was awarded the title of "Outstanding Teacher of the Year" by the Owensboro Junior Woman's Club Tuesday night. "Miss Emma" has been principal of Dunbar School for the past 37 years and is in her 50th year of teaching in the Owensboro School system. Mrs. Ronald Anderson, left, chairman of education for the club is shown with Miss Edwards for the honor. [ed. note – Emma Edwards was made principal of the Dunbar School in February 1938, thus she had been principal for 24 years not 37 years.]



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 4 June 1962, p.1B:



RETIRING AFTER 50 YEARS – Emma Edwards is here being congratulated by city school Superintendent Kenneth Estes at an Appreciation service yesterday at the Community Recreation Center. Some 200 Owensboroans, former students and fellow educators gathered at the affair to honor "Miss Emma" and at least 20 of them made appropriate remarks as part of the service. She is retiring after a total of 50 years service in the Owensboro and Daviess county school systems where she is presently principal at Dunbar School, a position she has held since 1934. [ed. note – should be since 1938]



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 1 May 1977, p.2C:

*Planned city park
named for teachers*

The planned city park at Seventh and Walnut streets will be known as the Barker-Edwards Park, city commissioners informally decided Friday at a staff meeting.

The one-acre park on the site of the old Walnut Elementary School is scheduled for development sometime next fall.

The name honors the late Samuel Lorenzo Barker and Emma E. Edwards, both former teachers and principals in the Owensboro school system. Each served the city for more than 50 years.

Barker served as principal of the former Eastern and Western elementary schools and was active in numerous civic, social, religious and political organizations.

Miss Edwards succeeded Barker as principal of Eastern, later renamed the Paul Laurence Dunbar School and later the Opportunity Center. She is now superintendent at the Mary Harding Home, a position she has held for a number of years.

Mary F. Morris, another retired teacher from the city's school system, made the recommendation.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 27 May 1979, pp.1E & 2E:

Mary's place

*Mary Harding had a vision in 1910
to build a home to care for blacks
— but the state view differs in 1979*



Jesse Barnes, 84, the rest home's resident nurse, returns home from a shopping errand. The home faces 7th Street on the corner of Orchard. Mary Harding's long-time administrator, 87-year-old Miss Emma Edwards, above (right) says, "We're not going to let them nail the doors up because this is our house." Miss Edwards recently retired from her position and the home's directors are seeking a full-time administrator.

By Sally Gelston, Messenger-Inquirer

Mary Harding was a handsome black woman with a vision. In 1910, she founded a home to care for Owensboro's blacks.

Today, 44 years after Mary Harding's death, the tradition she left is carried on at the rest home that bears her name. But the home now faces problems its visionary founder could not have foreseen.

"Mary Harding Home is a great asset to the community, a great heritage," said Bobby McCormick, the home's new co-administrator.

Together with Sherman Davidson, McCormick heads the board of directors for the facility, which he says can play an important role among its neighbors.

"Owensboro needs a place where the old can go if they aren't sick, where they don't have to sit and smell medicine. A place for those who are alone and have no other place to go," says McCormick's wife, Mary Helen.

Classified as a "personal care home," the two-story building stands proudly on the corner of 7th and Orchard streets in west Owensboro. Mary Harding Home shelters its self-sufficient residents in spotless surroundings, providing plenty of food and companionship.

But state regulations now require more. The Kentucky Department of Human Resources authorities threatened to close the home last November, and they have denied license renewal for the past two years.

The home has stayed open during this two-year period of continued communication with DHR to work out differences. A new administration moved in Friday to raise the home's health and social standards far above anything Miss Harding ever had to concern herself with back in 1910.

After meeting with a dozen DHR officials April 20, the board agreed to submit a plan of correction by Wednesday, May 30, detailing how and when they would clear up the deficiencies identified by the state, said DHR spokeswoman Joan Rhiem. "We consider this step a good faith effort on their part that they will raise the home's standards," she said. First on the board's list of innovations is locating a new administrator, Mrs. McCormick said. This involves not only finding the suitable person, but also securing the money for the new administrator's salary.

The home's most recent administrator worked 28 years without pay. That dynamo, who resigned her post Friday, May 18, is Miss Emma Edwards, an 87-year-old retired (Owensboro school teacher and principal.

Miss Emma, as people affectionately call her, said she's tired now, and shouldn't carry the responsibility of the home any longer. "I think someone else should learn how to do something," she said, so she's brought in some "young people" to take over.

Miss Emma is an Owensboro legend. Describing herself as "self-made," the feisty old black woman is powered by an iron will with a pride to match.

"I built this home ... "Miss Emma often says in her deep melodic drawl. Her dedication to Mary Harding Home began in 1933, and soon after, her mother entered it. When Miss Emma realized the home's untapped potential, she and her friends "worked like Trojans" to clear out the cockroaches, she said.

Later, she organized the renovation of the existing core, and in the 1950s, the addition of two new wings.

Miss Emma would drop by the home everyday after teaching school, she said. Sometimes she would sleep overnight to be available during one crisis or another.

Outside the home's walls, Miss Emma poured her energies into drumming up funds. "I went to every white church in town and made speeches. I told them that we were building a rest home for former slaves.

"I said, 'You didn't pay them what they were worth and you know it. It's time you give them something so they can finish their lives out in decency.'

"That money came in so fast once they realized we were doing what we said we'd do. And as you can see we've put all that money into the home."

Today, the facility's floors, walls and fixtures are sturdy, as well as immaculate. Miss Emma once wrote to state officials, "People have commented 'This is the only home we have visited where we haven't smelled urine.'

But the home does have unutilized space. . Upstairs two large meeting rooms are empty. "We've got two long tables and 24 chairs. I'd like to make this into a clubroom," Miss Emma said. The glassed-in porch upstairs is never used either.

The vacant second floor has a modernized bathroom and kitchen to serve the "clubroom." A metal fire escape installed 15 years ago at a cost of \$500, descends from a door off the spacious central hallway.

But before the board expands into the unused area, they want to increase the number of residents to 10 or 12, the home's capacity. Four elderly women and a man presently live in the quarters.

The search for residents is tough. Said Mrs. McCormick, "Anyone who can take care of themselves doesn't want to come into the home. They want to remain on their own." As a personal care home, Mary Harding admits only those who are able to get up and around on their own.

To attract residents, the new board plans to increase the frequency of recreational events. "You can't have a dance without a band," said McCormick.

Right now TV wins out as the number one pastime. During one evening, several women and staff members stared raptly at a console color TV.

Even when visitors come in, the residents often continue to watch television. "The last time we stopped in for a visit they were so engrossed in a boxing match on TV I had the feeling we could just leave anytime," said Ruth Westerfield, a Pilot Club member.

A classified service organization for professional women, the Pilot Club of Owensboro has taken cake and ice cream to Mary Harding Home every month for about 10 years. Club members visit this home much more frequently than they do the other Owensboro nursing homes.

"We feel many people aren't as aware of Mary Harding Home and don't visit there like they do other places," Mrs. Westerfield said.

Others besides the Pilot Club show an unselfish interest in the home. Owensboro attorney Stewart Elliott has voluntarily handled the home's paper work for the two-and-a-half years since he accepted the project from Judge William M. Gant.

"I think the state is being too harsh with them," Elliott said.

Among its list of deficiencies, the DHR says the home lacks the required shower stall equipped for wheelchair patients. However, the Mary Harding Home will not accept persons in wheelchairs because of its restrictions as a personal care home.

The home also does not provide the regular medical checkups the state requires, according to Mrs. McCormick. "When someone is sick we bundle them up and take them to the emergency room. But it's hard to find a doctor to come around regularly."

Miss Emma laments the passing of Dr. Reginald Neblett, the late Owensboro physician who "faithfully made his rounds" at the home.

Despite the changes through the years, the home's finances are weathering well. "We don't owe nothing to anybody, It's all paid for," said Miss Emma.

The Daviess Fiscal Court gives the home \$600 a year; the city of Owensboro gives it \$450. Residents' Social Security checks and pensions are channeled into the home's treasury, and when they need medical attention, residents have Medi care and Medicaid.

As an indication of their fiscal strength, the United Fund of Owensboro (now the United Way), which helps bolster the budgets of charitable organizations, dropped Mary Harding Home as a recipient six or seven years ago.

"We looked into their budget and decided they should be able to maintain themselves without United Fund money. So we channeled that money – several thousand dollars – into other agencies," said Bob Hubbard, former United Fund executive vice president.

Now that Miss Emma has handed over her job, the board may approach the state and other agencies for the funding needed to pay the new administrator's salary, said Mrs. McCormick.

But the feeling persists that this is merely one small hurdle in the home's long history of overcoming obstacles. Miss Emma herself is testimony to what's possible when someone recognizes a need and sees the solution.

After her years of service, she's glad the home's here for her, she said, "No need me being by myself when I can be with people."

With emphatic tone, Miss Emma said, "We don't want to nail the doors up, because it's our house."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 19 February 1980, p.5B:

'Miss Emma' gets United Way's humanitarianism award



Emma Edwards, 87, a leader in Owensboro's black community since World War I, has become the ninth recipient of the United Way of Owensboro-Daviess County's Humanitarianism Award.

But Miss Edwards – "Miss Emma" to the hundreds of children she taught in 50 years in Owensboro schools – was in Our Lady of Mercy Hospital and unable to attend the United Way's 15th annual banquet held at the Executive Inn Rivermont where her selection was announced Monday night.

A United Way spokesman said the presentation would be made in her hospital room later.

A graduate of Western High School in Owensboro, Chandler Normal School in Lexington and Kentucky State College in Frankfort, Miss Edwards began teaching as a substitute in 1913 at Pleasant Ridge in Daviess County.

The following year, she became a full-time member of the faculty at the old Western High School where she taught until 1923. She transferred to the old Paul Dunbar School in eastern Owensboro that year and became its principal in 1934 [ed. note – should be 1938], a position she held until her retirement in 1962.

In addition to her work in education, she also served in a variety of community capacities through the years. For 28 years, Miss Edwards served without pay as administrator of the Mary Harding Home in Owensboro. She began her association with the personal care home for elderly blacks in 1933 and frequently worked nights there after teaching school all day.

She also served as pianist for Center Street Baptist Church for 30 years and was choir director and organist at Fourth Street Baptist Church for a number of years.

Through the years, she also found time to work with the American Red Cross, American Cancer Society, the March of Dimes and the United Way. Miss Edwards is also credited with organizing the first black Girl Scout troop in Owensboro.

In 1962, her last year in the classroom, the Owensboro Junior or Woman's Club selected Miss Edwards as "Outstanding Teacher of the Year."

A one-acre park at 7th and Walnut streets in Owensboro was named Barker-Edwards Park in 1977 to honor Miss Edwards and the late Samuel Lorenzo Barker, another black educator in Owensboro.

Also at the Monday night meeting, Roy Stone, accounting supervisor at General Electric, was elected president of United Way for 1980.

Other officers elected were James Rine, first vice president; Paul Martin, second vice president; Walter Conner, treasurer, and Mary Ruth Emerson, secretary.

Elected to three terms on the United Way Board of Directors were William Abee, William Beauchamp, Walter Conner, Ed Davis, J. A. Frost, Patsy Hudson, Richard Leatherwood, James Kelso, Allen Kennedy, Louis Piskula and John Roskos.

Harold Nelson, O. D. Hazelrigg and Barney Thompson were elected to two terms filling vacancies. Sue Brister, Robert Hubbard, David Scott and Si Sanders were elected to one-year terms.

In the annual report, outgoing President Louis Johnson noted that a record high of \$700,800 had been raised in this year's United Way appeal.

Stone, the incoming president, said the new year begins with "the challenge to continue our winning record."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 21 February 1980, p.4A:

Emma Edwards: *Love commands award*

Humanitarianism is a \$50 word. But when it is applied to Emma Edwards, it is worth a whole lot more than that.

Emma Edwards received the United Way of Owensboro-Daviess County's Humanitarianism Award on Monday. Few people can claim to exemplify that love and concern for others Miss Edwards has exhibited her whole life.

A leader in the black community since the early part of the century, Miss Edwards has shared in many of the institutions which form the fabric of life.

< An educator of youth, she taught or administered in the school system in Owensboro for nearly 50 years.

< She worked for the elderly in the Mary Harding Home, a personal care home for elderly blacks.

< Pianist, choir director and organist in the church.

< Volunteer for public service agencies and raising organizations.

Miss Edwards' career has included a sampling of the voluntary associations and institutions which both shape people's lives or make life's trials a little easier to bear.

Sorry you couldn't be at the dinner to give an acceptance speech, Miss Emma. But even without you, your accomplishments and your giving for others spoke for themselves – and very eloquently, too.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 28 February 1980, p.4A:

readers write
Emma Edwards deserved award

Editor:

Having been out of town for a week, I was most inspired after returning home to learn that Miss Emma Edwards has become the ninth recipient of the United Way of Owensboro-Daviess County's Humanitarianism Award.

Not only has she accomplished a great deal in this community in the areas of education, human relations, personal care for the elderly, and other civic and service organizations, but she continues to contribute to the community through the RSVP Living History Program. She is an RSVP Living History speaker and she speaks to schools, colleges and civic and service clubs upon request.

That she is still contributing to the community at age 87 is more than remarkable. "Miss Emma" is most deserving of the Humanitarianism Award, and to repeat an old cliché, "to know her is to love her."

Martha M. Aromatorio
1616 Frederica St., Owensboro



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 5 March 1980, p.4A:

readers write
Award elicits gratitude

Editor:

I wish to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the United Way of Owensboro and Daviess County for the Humanitarianism Award and to the wonderful tributes published in the Messenger-Inquirer.

Reaching the very young age of 87 years, it gave me the thrill of a child receiving a new doll at Christmastime.

I have always had a great respect and deep affection for all people. Therefore I felt it my duty to minister to those less fortunate than I.

Many thanks and much love.

Emma E. Edwards
1509 Sweeney St., Owensboro



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 3 June 1991, p.2C:

LOCAL DEATHS

Miss Emma E. Edwards, 99, of Hillcrest Health Care Center, Owensboro, died there Sunday, June 2, 1991. She was born in Owensboro, retired in 1962 from the Owensboro school system, and was a former principal of Paul Dunbar School and a former administrator of the Mary Harding Home. She was a member of Fourth Street Baptist Church and Kentucky Retired Teachers Association.

Survivors include three great-nephews, Robert Rates Jr. of Aurora, Colo., William Rates at Atlanta and Glahn Rates of Las Vegas, Nev.; and two great-nieces, Mrs. Pearlene Baughman of Owensboro and Ms. Helen Rates of Los Angeles.

Young's Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 3 June 1991, p.2C:

**Former teacher, principal
Emma Edwards dies at 99**

Emma E. Edwards, a former schoolteacher, principal and rest home administrator who has been described as an "Owensboro legend," died Sunday morning at Hillcrest Health Care Center in Owensboro. She was 99.

Edwards worked for the city for more than 50 years. She was a teacher at the old Paul Dunbar school in Owensboro when it opened in 1923 and served as its principal until she retired in 1962.

The all-black elementary school was named for Paul Laurence Dunbar, one of the most popular writers and poets of the 1890s and 1900s, who died at age 33 in 1906. The integration of city schools in 1963 brought about an end to the two-story brick building at 721 Jackson St. It was too small to serve an integrated student body.

Edwards, called "Miss Emma" by students and friends, was credited by many as being the single most important factor in the influence Dunbar School had on its community. Theodora Smith of Pleasant Ridge said Edwards was her first teacher. Smith said her teacher was a "lovely person and she helped lots of people. She gave her life for her community and her people."

Edwards was determined that the children she taught learn and receive an education. The Rev. R.L. McFarland, who was one of Edwards' students, said she was an outgoing person who tried to do something to help others. She was sort of a foster mother to a lot of young people, he said, and she saw to it that some kids had food and clothes at her own expense.

Edwards was a force in the operation and maintenance of the Mary Harding Home, founded in 1910 to care for the needs of Owensboro's blacks. Her association with the personal care home began in 1933 shortly before her mother moved into it.

During the time she worked at the home, 28 years were spent without pay. She and friends and co-workers helped clean and maintain the building and later she organized several renovations and helped raise funds for the home. She would stop by the home most every day after teaching school and sometimes would sleep overnight to be available to help out when the need arose. She later became administrator and resigned from that position in May 1979.

The Mary Harding Home closed in June 1988 and was later used as a mission and shelter for the homeless for a while.



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 9 November 1997, p.1G
& 11 October 1998, p.3E; and Daviess County, Kentucky,
1815-2015, Celebrating Our Heritage, Daviess County
Bicentennial Committee (Evansville, IN:
M. T. Publishing Company, Inc., 2015) p.123:**



The Western High School Class of 1911 is shown here. Seated, left to right, are Lucille Marie Hunter, O.A. [sic] Guthrie (principal), Delphene Mosley

and Ethel C. Hall. Standing, left to right, are Theresa (Babe) Wilhite, Levi James, Rida Virginia McMickens, Emma Ernestine Edwards, Elmo Bean and Esther Jane Richardson.



Daviess County, Kentucky Celebrating Our Heritage, 1815-2015, Daviess County Bicentennial Committee, Mt. Publishing Company, Inc., Evansville, IN, 2015, p.169:

The Mary Harding Home

By Wesley Acton and Aloma Dew

The Mary Harding Home founded in January 1910, started out as a residence for wayward children and those who were orphaned living on the streets of Owensboro. It was started by the civic minded Mary Harding for whom the home was later named. After serving many children in the community, Mary Harding saw the need for a facility for the elderly in Owensboro. At the time there was nowhere for elderly African Americans without family or money to go. The mission of the Mary Harding Home changed course to fill a larger need in the community. She and her forward-thinking friends, Molly Edwards, and her daughter Emma Edwards, Molly Cable, Kelly Barker, Betty Price, Nettie Clark, Mary Jane MacMickens, Elsie Robinson, Nannie Locke, Ella Valentine, Georgia Merriweather, Mary Bell Foster, Hattie Cornelius, S.R. Guthrie, and An-ilia Wheatley became the charter members of the Mary Harding Home which later evolved into a board of directors. Those women through their hard work and kind hearts had such a positive effect on the community as they strove to meet the needs of elderly housing in the city.

What started out as a two room house, grew and changed over the years. As needs arose and finances permitted, the home grew into a two-story building occupying two lots on 7th Street. The Mary Harding Home first housed only women, but added space for men when the need arose. Many of the materials such as lumber and brick came from older homes that were torn down in the Owensboro area. The home was also financed by contributions from local churches and fundraisers by the Board. Later, Emma Edwards was able to get financial help from the local and state governments, as well as through United Way which was still the United Fund at the time. A local resident, Samuel Rone, left his house on Poplar Street to the Mary Harding Home. That home was rented to tenants and the proceeds were used to help finance the needs of the Mary Harding Home and its residents. No resident was ever charged and no one was ever turned away.

One of the volunteers, Mattie Scott, later became the first paid matron of the home doing all the cooking and cleaning for the meager sum of \$25 a month. Later, she was given a room at the home as part of her salary. All of the other work was done by volunteers.

With the financial support of many white churches and with most of the volunteers and board members being from the black community, the Mary Harding Home served as one of the early institutions that helped to integrate Owensboro. The Home brought both races together to work for the common good of those in need. Because of declining residents, the Mary Harding Home closed its doors in June 1988.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 25 March 2026, pp.1A & 5A:

Figueroa-Peralta wins ATHENA Award

.... [The ATHENA Awards were held locally for the 28th time during the annual awards ceremony at the Owensboro Convention Center on Tuesday]....

.... Also receiving recognition during the ceremony was the late Emma Edwards. She received the Legacy Award, which was presented in partnership with the Owensboro chapter of the American Association of University Women (AAUW).

Edwards graduated from Western High School in Owensboro and from Kentucky State College. In 1913, she began her teaching career at Pleasant Ridge in Daviess County. The following year, she joined the faculty at Western High School. In 1923, she transferred to Paul Dunbar School, where she became principal in 1934 and faithfully served until her retirement in 1962.

Affectionately known as "Miss Emma," she was a leader in the Black community and was widely described as a "legend." She worked with the American Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, the March of Dimes and United Way. Prior to her retirement, she was named the "Outstanding Teacher of the Year" by the Owensboro Junior Woman's Club and later received the 9th Humanitarian Award from the United Way.



Emma E. Edwards was principal of the Paul Dunbar School, 721 Jackson Street, in Owensboro, KY, 1938-1962. She was transferred to teach at the school when it was opened in 1923. The all black elementary school was closed in 1963 when all city schools were integrated. The Opportunity Center School for the mentally retarded was housed here until the deteriorated building was razed in 1979.