



Rebecca Dallis (b. 1896, d. 1971)

Rebecca Dallis was a beloved school teacher and education advocate in the Casa Grande community. She was an inspiration to her students. She gained the respect and admiration of the community by demonstrating determination and a commitment to education.

Rebecca (Huey) Dallis was born in Cornville, Indiana. She attended Swift Memorial College. Her husband W.C. Dallis attended Tennessee State University. They married in 1923 and moved to Arizona in 1929. Initially, they settled in Phoenix and operated the Dallis Funeral Home until 1932. During this time, Rebecca earned a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Arizona in 1934.

The couple moved to Casa Grande in 1935 and Rebecca became the teacher of the one room Southside Colored School located behind Southside Elementary School. Between 1920 and 1940 the African American population in Casa Grande was small. The 1920 U.S. Census recorded no African-Americans in Casa Grande. The 1930 census recorded a population of 234 African-Americans in Pinal County; only 29 resided in Casa Grande. The number had grown to 52 in Casa Grande by 1940, but history now shows that minorities, including African-Americans, were often undercounted.

In Arizona, African-Americans generally worked in agriculture, housekeeping, and other service jobs. There were few professionals such as Mr. and Mrs. Dallis, both trained educators. During the early and mid 20th century African-Americans still faced segregation in jobs, schools, neighborhoods, and public facilities in Casa Grande as well as throughout the state of Arizona. African-Americans were excluded from Arizona schools in the 1920s and from 1931- 1934 only a few attended Southside Elementary School.

In late 1934 the city opened the Southside Colored School. Dallis instructed as many as 70 children from Kindergarten through the 8th grade in the one-room schoolhouse teaching them standard reading, writing, and arithmetic. She also taught music and sewing; utilized advanced students as tutors; and often taught outdoors to minimize noise in the classroom. She worked to ensure that African-American students received the best education possible despite the limitations and challenges of working in a segregated community.

Dallis, like many who worked in African-American segregated schools across the nation, struggled with inadequate funding, second-hand supplies and equipment, as well as racial discrimination in the school system. She earned one-third less than Euro-American teachers, but was known to teach high school in her home at a time when African-American students were not provided with a public high school education. Segregation in Casa Grande schools continued until 1962.

Dallis later taught at the East School and after desegregation was named principal of the school. She and her husband also taught in Stanfield, Arizona and the school was named for Rebecca's father. W.C. continued to teach there for many years after Rebecca moved on to the Casa Grande Southside Colored School. She was later a member of the Casa Grande Library Board and taught special education classes at the Spero School of Trinity Southern Baptist Church. She and her husband William Curtis Dallis, lived and worked in the Casa Grande region from 1935 until her retirement in 1965 and passing in 1971.

To learn more about Rebecca Dallis and education in Casa Grande visit the Casa Grande Valley Historical Society Museum. The Southside Colored School house was relocated to the Museum grounds from its original location. Visitors can now step into the one-room school house and imagine children working under the guidance of Rebecca Dallis.

