

**LEANNA  
CELESTE  
CLARK  
1863-1933**



**FIRST  
MTHS  
BAND  
DIRECTOR**

When the first Board of Education was established in Muskogee in 1898, grade schools were established for both white and black students. In 1909, Muskogee voted for a bond issue to build a school for black high school students. The first class entered in 1910, graduating in 1912. The new school followed an educational movement popular at the time known as the manual training method, and the high school was named Manual Training High School (MTHS).

Manual training was a system of education sweeping across America and modeled after European schools. Beside teaching the fundamentals, it also focused on drafting, mechanics, and the use of basic tools to give students an understanding of basic mechanical principles and prepare them for a wide range of jobs.

MTHS was subject to segregation inequities, but the school still provided a quality education for its students, with its winning athletic programs and competitive academic teams. When MTHS opened on September 26, 1910, Mrs. Leanna Clark welcomed 111 students to her music program.

Leanna Celeste Johnson was born in April 1863 in Natchez, Mississippi. She lived with her maternal grandparents, relatives of John R. Lynch, who rose from a Natchez slave to become the first African-American Speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1873. Leanna started her music education in 1880 “under the highest priced and trained instructors” at both Natchez and Cincinnati, where she and her brother Theodore lived.

She attended John Gaines High School and lived in the household of the principal Peter Humphries Clark, an associate of Frederick Douglass. Both were abolitionists and nationally-prominent speakers. Under Clark’s guidance, Leanna also developed an excellent political education.

After leaving Cincinnati, Leanna taught at Owensboro, Kentucky and then St. Joseph, Louisiana, where her mother lived. In July 1883, she married high school principal Herbert Clark and returned to Cincinnati where he became the editor of the African-American newspaper. In 1893, they moved to St. Louis where Herbert co-founded a new newspaper called the Afro-American News.

They next moved to Columbia, Missouri where Herbert taught and attended school part-time. In March 1902, they moved to Lawrence, Kansas where Herbert taught Indian students at the Haskell Institute. Leanna opened her own millinery shop where she sold ladies’ hats and notions.

When they arrived in Muskogee in 1904, Leanna joined the Fortnightly Culture Club, where she sometimes sang at meetings. She continued selling ladies’ hats and ready-made aprons on South Second Street but a move closer to downtown didn’t improve her business so she closed her doors.

By 1907, Leanna returned to her first love by offering music lessons in her home. When the Muskogee Board of Education was struggling with staffing MTHS, they hired Leanna who had superior musical training, paying her \$70 a month.

Not much is known as her music teaching career but Leanna Clark taught for twenty years until she retired in the summer of 1931. She died in August 1933 at age 70 and is buried in Hardin Memorial Cemetery north of Muskogee.