

**WILLA
ALLEGRA
STRONG
1906-1971**



**HER
“CAN
DO”
ATTITUDE**

L’Ouverture School opened in 1908 to serve the African-American community in McAlester. In the winter of 1934-35, in the depth of the Depression, a gymnasium was added to the school. This building would also serve as an African American social center.

The school closed in 1968, when McAlester Schools were integrated. Class of 1965 graduates Herbert Keith and Primus Moore bought the closed school in 2014, determined to save a piece of McAlester history before it crumbled to the ground. They also wanted to preserve it as a legacy to long-time principal Willa Strong who touched so many lives.

Willa Allegra Strong was born in June 1906 in McAlester, Indian Territory, shortly before statehood. When Willa attended L’Ouverture School, it had four classrooms. After graduating in 1924, she received her Bachelors degree at the University of Kansas.

She began her teaching career in 1929 at L’Ouverture Elementary School. At the same time, she completed her Master’s degree at the University of Chicago. In 1939, she was named principal of L’Ouverture Elementary and High School, a position she would hold for the next 30 years. In 1957, she received her Ph.D. in Education from the University of Oklahoma.

Dr. Strong developed a reputation as one of Oklahoma's foremost African American educators. In 1956, she was elected president of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers. She was also active in civic work. The McAlester Community Concert Association and the Human Relations Council were two of her special interests. When McAlester City Council set up any special committees concerning local citizens, she was often appointed to represent the African American interests.

When L’Ouverture School closed, Dr. Strong was not pleased. She told her patrons, "I've talked with our school officials and we have no choice but to integrate. We realize this is part of the pattern, calling for new attitudes and guidance to make the judgment." Dr. Strong was assigned as vice principal of the McAlester Junior High School but health forced her to retire in June 1970, ending her 41-year education career.

She died in August 1971 at age 64. In her memory, McAlester City Council renamed 11th Street to Strong Boulevard. Later, the L’Ouverture Alumni Association erected a historical marker on Strong Boulevard in her memory. In 2014, she was inducted into the Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame.

Dr. Strong held memberships in Oklahoma Education Association, National Education Association, Federation of French Teachers of America, and N.A.A.C.P. Her honors included: Who’s Who of American Women and Daughters of the American Revolution Award for Excellence in Historical Research. She was also honored by the Kappa Delta Pi Honorary Society and Alpha Kappa Delta Honorary Sociological Society.

Known for being an inspirational educational leader, her life devotion was to ensure the achievement of each child who passed through the doors of L’Ouverture School. She instilled her own “CAN DO” attitude in her students and her faculty.