

Mary McLeod Bethune: The Black Velvet Rose by Dr. Nancy Long (Available on Amazon)

1. On May 18, 1955, when Mary McLeod Bethune died, she was considered one of the greatest black women to have lived. The *Christian Century* said that “the story of her life should be taught to every school child.”

The *Pittsburgh Courier* stated “In any race or nation she would have been an outstanding personality and made a noteworthy contribution because her chief attribute was her indomitable soul.”

The *Washington Post* commented that “Not only her own people but all America has been enriched and ennobled by her courageous, ebullient spirit.”

How could a poor black woman, 15th of 17 children, raised by former slaves, achieve such notoriety? She arose at a time when women, especially black women, were given little respect. Despite the extreme poverty and prejudice she faced, Mary M Bethune became one of the greatest Americans of her time. What was her secret? Her deep faith in God!

These are her words: “Faith is the first factor in a life devoted to service. Without faith, nothing is possible, With Faith, nothing is impossible, Faith in God is the greatest Power...but great, too, is faith in oneself.”

2. Mary McLeod Bethune was born on July 10, 1875 –near Mayesville, South Carolina.
3. Her parents Patsy and Sam McLeod had 17 children. They were former slaves, and Mary was their 15th child and their first free born child.
4. This is the McLeod home where after the Civil War; the family members were all free and able to own their own property.
5. Mary always wanted to learn to read. Her mother worked at a plantation nearby where she had been a slave and now was employed as a maid. Mary went with her mother one day to the house and the owners children were reading books, and she picked one up only to be told by the children that she needed a picture book as she could not read.
At the age of 7, she convinced her father to let her go to school despite the fact he needed hands in the cotton field. She walked 5 miles a day to and from school. Education was very important to her, and she proved herself to be a hard-working intelligent student. After 6th grade, she wanted to attend Scotia Seminary, but the family mule died and they needed to buy another. There was no money for her tuition, but the family prayed.
 - Shortly afterward, a letter arrived stating that a Quaker seamstress Mary Chrisman from Colorado had donated a scholarship for one black child, and Mary was selected to receive that money. Mary said, , “To this day, my heart thrills with gratitude at the memory of that day when a poor dressmaker, sewing for her daily bread, heard my call and came to my assistance, Out of her scanty earnings, she invested in a life-my life!” Mary was able to attend Scotia Seminary and graduated in 1887.
6. Mary then was accepted and got a scholarship to the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. She was the only black student out of 1000 enrolled. Doing laundry and cleaning to help pay for her room and board, Mary graduated in 1895, and returned to her family in Mayesville, SC.

- She wanted to be a missionary in Africa, but there were no openings for her as at that time black missionaries were not allowed. Her work as a teacher made her realize “that Africans in America needed Christ and school just as much as Negroes in Africa.”

7. She got a job as a teacher in Sumter, S.C. Mary sent her entire teaching salary home to cover tuition for her 2 younger sisters to go to school and to help her parents pay off their debts. She met Albert Bethune at a church choir practice. They married in 1898. Their only son Albert was born one year later.
8. Mary at first planned to start her school in Palatka, a small town of rough but hardworking people. She went on a short trip to work with migrant workers in Daytona, and during her absence her home with all of the family possessions burned to the ground.

She interpreted this as a sign from God that she should go to Daytona. Mary came to the East Side of Florida in 1904 because there was nothing education wise for Negro boys and girls in Daytona. Her son was 5 at the time and they lived with Mrs. Warren. Her 3 daughters were the first little girls enrolled in the school.
9. On Oct. 1904, the school was started in a rented building owned by John Williams, a contractor. No one thought the school would last long. The legend goes that John Williams wanted \$11 in rent, but Mary had only \$1.50 and the promise to pay him as she could. He accepted the offer.
10. This first school started with packing crates found at the dump, no furniture, burnt sticks used as charcoal for pencils, ink made from mashed elderberries, and a meat wrapping from a butcher used for paper.
11. She said, ***"I had no furniture. I begged dry goods boxes and made benches and stools; begged a basin and other things I needed and in 1904 five little girls here started school."***
12. Student enrollment grew. Through her hotel programs, she met a German named Hinski who owned the Pines Hotel and a large piece of property on 2nd Ave. This land was called “Hell’s Hole” as it was being used as a city dump. She asked to buy the land for a school, and she said she’d pay for it as she could. “That’s good enough for me,” said Hinski. She gave Hinski \$5 in coins wrapped in a handkerchief, money raised from the pie and ice cream sales. The only papers signed were the deed turning the land over to Mary, as Hinski took her word and believed in her.
13. As the students cleaned up the dumpsite, Mary continued to raise money for the school. She rode a second hand bicycle all over Daytona, telling people about the school and asking for help. Students made pies and ice cream to sell. Students would sing at hotels and churches, and Mary and 4 friends created a quintet of their own.
14. The motto of the school was “Enter to learn: Depart to serve.”

The goal was to educate the students and teach them practical skills so that they could get a job and become a contributing individual to society. The land became a farm, which the girls ran. They raised vegetables for canning and selling. Meat from cows, hogs, and chickens was stored for students use. Students ground syrup cane. Mary’s brother came to the school to help the girls learn farming techniques. Mary believed in educating heart, head, and hand.
15. *"No matter how deep my hurt, I always smiled. I refused to be discouraged, for neither God nor man can use a discouraged person."*

- Mary McLeod Bethune Mary continued to work hard to fund the school.

16. Mary arranged a meeting with the business magnate James Gamble. She showed him the site, and when he asked, "Where is this school?" She replied, "In my mind and in my soul!" Gamble became one of her leading supporters.
17. Another supporter was Thomas White, owner of the White Sewing machine Company, who attended a student show at a hotel. After hearing her speech, he went out to the school the next day to find students sleeping on straw matting from the dump, and cornmeal as the only food for that day. He became a generous supporter and left a trust fund for the school at his death 7 years later.
18. White Hall is named after Thomas White.
19. Besides continuous fundraising efforts, Mary was active in registering Blacks and women to vote. In 1920, because Mary had been working hard to encourage voting, the local Klu Klux Klan marched on campus. Led by a burning cross, about one hundred robed figures were shouting and blowing horns as they approached the main building, causing the young girls to begin to scream and cry hysterically. Mary ordered the girls to turn off all the lights in the building and then had the spotlights outside turned on, so that the Klan was now in full view while the teachers and students watched them from the darkness. One of the students began to sing, "God will take care of us." Soon a chorus of female voices could be heard singing Gospel songs. The Klan realized that they had failed in their intimidation attempt and dispersed. The next day, blacks had to wait in line until all the white folks had voted. Standing inline all day, Mary and the other blacks finally got to vote. Lined up for 5 blocks at 7 PM, they continued to cast their votes until 1 AM. The Klan's candidate was defeated, and a more liberal candidate who believed in rights for all people was elected.
20. GET PHOTO OF HEYN CHAPEL 20
- Tirelessly Mary continued to expand the school, travel to get funds and develop benefactors, and expand services to the community. She promoted integration at a time when no other place in the South permitted it. She began Temperance meetings every Sunday at 3:00, and all members of the community would come to hear famous speakers she invited, and share ideas with fellow community members. Ushers placed people, white or black, wherever there was a vacant seat. Everyone sat together.
- A small girl at her school became ill and the white hospital refused to help the child. This inspired Mary to push for the establishment of the first hospital for blacks in the city, which started as a 2-bed room building near the school.
21. As years passed, the reputation of the school flourished, and graduates were known to be well-educated, model citizens who were involved in their communities. Mary's reputation also grew, and as a friend of many influential people including President and Mrs. Roosevelt, she continued to be a leader and advocate for blacks.
22. Even as she grew famous, the southern society would not change. Wealthy families on beach side would make donations to the school, but she still had to use the back door if she visited. After her friendship with President and Mrs. Roosevelt was established, Mary was in Daytona when a white friend and benefactor died. Attending the funeral service at the mansion, Mary realized the blacks that had come to pay their respects to this well liked woman were restricted to the back kitchen area. She herself was invited to join the whites in the main part of the house, but she insisted that her fame would not make her exception. She stayed with the black group of mourners.

23. In 1927, a friend was planning a 9 country tour through Europe and Mary's friends paid for her trip as a well deserved vacation. It was in Switzerland that Mary saw the black velvet rose. *"Roses of every color! And in the midst of the garden I saw a great big Black Velvet Rose. I never saw a Black Velvet Rose before, and I said to myself, 'Oh! This is the great interracial garden; this is the garden where we have people of all colors, all classes, all creeds. .. This shall always be before me as a great Interracial Garden where men and women of all tongues, all nations, all creeds, all classes blend together helping to send out sunshine and love and peace and brotherhood that make a better world in which to live.'"*
24. Mary's political involvement grew. Plagued with severe asthma, she still continued to work to better the conditions for blacks through her political activities and organization leadership.
- 1928: Hurricane hits Florida, and Mary organizes the rescue efforts through the Red Cross.
 1930: She attends her first White House Conference on Child Health and Protection.
 1935: The NAACP awards Mary the Joel E. Springarn Gold Medal for her achievements.
 1935: Mary founds the National Council of Negro Women.
 1936: She becomes the Director of Negro Affairs for the National Youth Administration.
25. National Association of Colored Women's Headquarters was dedicated on July 28, 1928, at the location of Twelfth and O Streets. At the end of her speech, she read the following poem:
- If you can't be a pine on top of the hill,
 Be a scrub in the valley;
 But be the best little scrub
 That grows by the till.
 Be a bush, if you can't be a tree.
 If you can't be a bush, be a bit of the grass.
 And some highway the happier make.
 If you can't be a muskie, just be a bass,
 But be the liveliest bass in the lake.
26. We can't all be captains; we've got to be crew,
 There's plenty of work for us here.
 There's a big work to do and a lesser;
 But our task is the one that is near.
 If you can't be a highway, just be a trail,
 If you can't be a sun, be a star.
 It's not in your size you win or lose,
 Be the best of what ever you are!
27. She was advisor to 4 presidents, and especially close friends with Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor.
28. During WWII, Mary served as a 4 star general and helped get Black women enlisted in the Women's Army Corps.
29. Mary received the Citation for Outstanding Citizenship from President Truman.
30. 1949: Mary is awarded the Medal of Honor and Merit in Haiti.
 1952: She receives the Order of the Star of Africa from the Liberian president and tours Africa, fulfilling her life long dream of visiting Africa.

31. Mary represents the United States at the Moral ReArmament World Assembly in Switzerland
32. An elderly Mary finally retires to the Foundation, her home on the Bethune Cookman Campus. Here she composed her Last Will and testament.
33. (Elderly Mary on porch) In her Last Will and Testament, she wrote the following:

Sometimes as I sit communing in my study, I feel that death is not far off. I am aware that it will overtake me before the greatest of my dreams--full equality for the Negro in our times-- is realized. Yet, I face the reality without fear or regrets. I am resigned to death, as all humans must be at the proper time. Death neither alarms nor frightens one who has had a long career of fruitful toil. The knowledge that my work has been helpful to many fills me with joy and great satisfaction.

Since my retirement from an active role in educational work and from the affairs of the National Council of Negro Women, I have been living quietly and working at my desk at my home here in Florida. The years have directed a change of pace for me. I am now 76 years old and my activities are no longer so strenuous as they once were. I feel that I must conserve my strength to finish the work at hand.

Already, I have begun working on my autobiography which will record my life journey in detail, together with the innumerable side trips which have carried me abroad, into every corner of our country, into homes, both lowly and luxurious, and even into the White House to confer with the Presidents. I have also deeded my home and its contents to the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation, organized in 1955, for research, interracial activity and sponsorship of wider educational opportunities.

Sometimes I ask myself if I have any other legacy to leave. Truly, my worldly possessions are few. Yet my experiences have been rich. From them I have distilled principles and policies in which I believe firmly, for they present the meaning of my life's work. They are the products of much sweat and sorrow. Perhaps, in them, there is something of value. So as my life draws to a close, I will pass them on to Negroes everywhere in the hope that an old woman's philosophy may give them inspiration. Here, then, is my legacy.

36. I leave you love. Love builds. It is positive and helpful. Personally and racially, our enemies must be forgiven.

I leave you hope. The Negroes growth will be great in the years to come.

I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another. As long as Negroes are hemmed into racial blocks of prejudice and pressure, it will be necessary for them to band together for economic betterment.

I leave you a thirst for education. Knowledge is the prime need of the hour.

I leave you faith. Faith is the first factor in life devoted to service. Without faith, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible. Faith in God is the greatest power, but great too is faith in oneself.

37. I leave you racial dignity. I want Negroes to maintain their human dignity at all costs.

I leave you a desire to live harmoniously with your fellow man. The problem of color is worldwide. And I appeal to American Negroes, north and South, East and West- to recognize their common problems and unite to solve them.

I leave you finally a responsibility to our young people. The world around us really belongs to youth, for youth will take over its future management. Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world, they

must not be discouraged from aspiring toward greatness, for they are to be the leaders of tomorrow.

If I have a legacy to leave my people, it is my philosophy of living and serving. As I face tomorrow, I am content, for I think I have spent my life well, I pray now that my philosophy may be helpful to those who share my vision of the world. Peace.

Mary died on May 18, 1955, in her home on the campus of her beloved Bethune Cookman College. The old bell tolled loudly and slowly as the community realized this incredible woman was dead.

38. This amazing woman who had such humble beginnings had become one of the most influential women in history.
39. In 1985 the United States Post Office dedicated a stamp to Mary McLeod Bethune.