

William H. Holland Biography

William H. Holland was a local leader in Austin who spent much of his career in both the public and private sectors working to provide quality education to African-American students in Texas.

Holland was born into slavery in Marshall, Texas in the 1840s. His father, a white man named Bird Holland, bought William and his brothers' freedom in the 1850s and moved with them to Ohio. In 1864, Holland enlisted in the Union Army and fought in the battles of Nashville and Overton Hill.¹ After the Civil War, Holland attended Oberlin College in Ohio before ultimately returning to Texas and teaching in Travis County public schools.²

Holland's life and career in Texas illustrate his great skill and his commitment to public service. He was active in both public policy and politics, serving as a state representative, a county commissioner, and as a delegate to the Texas Colored Men's Convention and two National Republican Conventions.³

In 1875, voters in Wharton, Waller, and Fort Bend Counties elected Holland to the Texas House of Representatives with a majority of 2,472 votes.⁴ He served there for one term, during which he authored legislation establishing Prairie View A&M University. Travis County voters subsequently elected him to the Travis County Commissioners Court, where he served until 1884.⁵

After leaving the Travis County Commissioners Court, Holland played a significant role in establishing the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Institute for Colored Youth in 1887. According to one account, the bill to establish the institution initially stalled in the Texas Senate on the final day of the legislative session. With only a half hour remaining before adjournment, Holland successfully lobbied a senator to move the bill forward.⁶

The Texas Senate ultimately passed the bill and Texas Governor Lawrence Ross signed it into law. Later that year, Ross appointed Holland to serve as the school's first superintendent. Holland's wife, Eliza, also worked at the school, educating hearing-impaired students.⁷ This institution, located on Bull Creek Road between 38th Street and 45th Street, served African-American children with disabilities.⁸ It was one of the predecessor institutions to the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, which is today located on 45th Street in the Brentwood neighborhood.⁹

Holland's public service and commitment to quality education extended into the private sector, as well. He founded Friend in Need, a charitable organization dedicated to providing financial assistance to help African-American students attain an education.¹⁰

Holland died in 1907, during his second tenure as the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Institute for Colored Youth's superintendent. Holland's contemporaries described him as very intelligent, educated, and sensible and praised his speaking abilities.¹¹ After Holland's death, a friend and colleague recalled Holland's humility and integrity: "Holland never praised Holland, and every time I came in contact with him I saw some new and noble quality that I had not before observed."¹²

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References

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- ¹⁰ Brewer, John Mason. "Negro Legislators of Texas and Their Descendants," Mathis Publishing Co. (1935).
- ¹¹ Daniell, L.E. "Personnel of the Texas State Government with Sketches of Distinguished Texans, 21st Legislature," Smith, Hicks & Jones, State Printers (1889).
- ¹² Brewer, John Mason. "Negro Legislators of Texas and Their Descendants," Mathis Publishing Co. (1935).