

Governor Morehead School ^[1]

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Governor Morehead School for Blind. Image available from the Department of Health and Human Services. ^[2]See also: [Special Education](#) ^[3]

The [Governor Morehead School](#) ^[4], North Carolina's school for blind people, opened in 1845 as the [North Carolina Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind](#) ^[5]. This state-supported, educational program for students with disabilities was one of the first of its kind in the South. William D. Cooke of the Deaf and Dumb Institution at Staunton, Va., wrote to North Carolina governor [John Motley Morehead](#) ^[6] in 1843 suggesting that enough students could be recruited from North Carolina's "deaf-mutes," then estimated to be about 280, and from the overflow at the Staunton school to start a private school in North Carolina. Morehead, already an advocate of educating citizens with disabilities, brought his correspondence with Cooke to the attention of the [Presbyterian Synod of North Carolina](#) ^[7] when it met in Raleigh in 1844 and gained their support. Later in 1844, Morehead sent a message to the General Assembly suggesting the establishment of a public school for the "deaf, dumb, and blind." The Governor Morehead School was also the first school for Black, blind students in the United States when it was opened to disabled Black students in 1867.

On 8 Jan. 1845, the legislature approved an act "to provide for the education of the poor and destitute deaf-mutes and blind persons in this State." This act provided \$5,000 annually from the [Literary Fund](#) ^[8] and established that \$75 for each student with a disability be paid yearly by the county from which he or she came. A building on Hillsboro Street (modern-day Hillsborough Street) in [Raleigh](#) ^[9], two blocks west of the [capitol](#) ^[10] building, was rented, four teachers were employed, and the North Carolina Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind opened on 1 May 1845. Cooke was elected principal (a title applied to the head of the school until 1918) and opened the school with 23 deaf students between the ages of 8 and 32 who attended classes in reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography, domestic and industrial arts, and the Bible. With a \$15,000 appropriation by the legislature, land for a new school was purchased around 1849 on Caswell Square in Raleigh at the intersection of Jones and McDowell Streets, and a board of directors was established.

Blind students were not enrolled in the school until 1851. Cooke established [vocational](#) ^[11] classes for older students. Blind girls were taught knitting, and deaf girls were taught sewing; blind boys were taught broom making, and deaf boys were taught shoe making and printing. The *Annals for the Deaf* was published at the school for several years, and in 1851 the *Deaf-Mute Casket* ^[12] appeared under Cooke's editorship. The *Casket* was the first paper printed for and by deaf students in one of their own schools. Books for blind people, using raised letters, were also produced. Printing was done for the public, and some tradespeople in Raleigh complained about the competition. In 1858, the school enrolled 39 deaf and 18 blind students.

In 1867, North Carolina first addressed the need for a school for deaf, speech-disabled, and blind [Black](#) ^[13] people. The [U.S. War Department](#) ^[14] agreed to pay rent for a suitable building and to supply rations, and the North Carolina Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind was asked to provide teachers and supervision. The "Colored School" opened on 4 Jan. 1869 in a building rented from the [American Missionary Association](#) ^[15] in southeastern Raleigh with 21 deaf students and 7 blind students. This was the first school for Black, blind students in the United States.

The [General Assembly](#) ^[16] appropriated money for the establishment of a separate school for white deaf students in 1891. When this new school in [Morganton](#) ^[17] opened in 1894, white blind students remained on Caswell Square in Raleigh, and Black blind students and Black deaf students remained on South Bloodworth Street in Raleigh. John E. Ray became principal of the North Carolina Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind in 1896. Enrollment

reached 535 in 1912, making the school the largest of its kind in America at the time. Through Ray's efforts, the General Assembly passed a law for the compulsory school attendance of blind students, which now requires blind students between the ages of 7 and 18 to attend school. In 1905 the name of the institution was changed to the State School for the Blind and Deaf, and in 1913 \$30,000 was appropriated by the General Assembly to purchase^[18] a 75-acre tract adjoining Pullen Park in Raleigh. With an additional \$150,000 from the legislature in 1917^[19], plans were made to move the school for white blind students to the current location on Ashe Avenue in Raleigh.

In 1929 the General Assembly^[20] appropriated funds to purchase 234 acres on U.S. 70, also called Garner Road, for the school's programs for Black deaf students and Black blind students. Between 1949 and 1959, the General Assembly^[21] appropriated approximately \$1 million for additional buildings and development of the Garner Road campus. In 1959 the school's board of directors instructed the superintendent, Egbert Peeler, to consider consolidating the Garner Road and Ashe Avenue campuses. The General Assembly authorized the board in 1963 to change the name of the school to the Governor Morehead School in honor of former governor John Motley Morehead.

In 1967 the General Assembly^[22] and the board of directors announced plans for the phasing out of services for Black deaf students at the Garner Road campus and for transferring those students to the "two other Schools for the Deaf in North Carolina" (in Morganton and Wilson). During 1968 new superintendent Samuel Cole began his term, and a study published by a private architectural firm indicated that the Ashe Avenue campus was the more desirable location for a one-campus site for Black and white blind students. By 1971 the consolidation was complete. The newly formed Governor Morehead School received reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools^[23] in 1972 and conducted its first summer camp in 1974 at the F. B. Simmons Future Farmers of America Camp in Swansboro. Full integration of the school was achieved and enforced in 1977. In 1979 the board of directors approved the school's seal, which featured a bell, and recommended the school motto be selected by the students and staff. The motto selected was "By Faith, Not By Sight." The modern Governor Morehead School offers complete educational and residential programs for visually impaired students from North Carolina, from birth through age 21.

References:

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William S. Powell, *North Carolina through Four Centuries* (1989).

Additional Resources:

"About GMS." Governor Morehead School. Available at https://www.governormorehead.net/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1550434&type=d&pREC_ID=1676638^[24].

Carlisle, Olivia and Lauren McCoy. "The Governor Morehead School and World Braille Day." *History For All the People Blog* from the State Archives of North Carolina: Raleigh, NC. January 4, 2023. Available at <https://ncarchives.wpcomstaging.com/2023/01/04/the-governor-morehead-sch...>^[25].

Governor Morehead School: <http://www.governormorehead.net>^[4]

North Carolina Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind Institution for the Deaf & Dumb and the Blind. The Work Shops at the Institution Are in Good Working Order, and Persons Desiring Work Can Get It Done on Satisfactory Terms. DocSouth, UNC: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/deafblind/menu.html>^[5] (accessed September 18, 2012).

Governor Morehead School, NC Historical Marker H-46, NC Office of Archives and History: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=H-46%20-%20THE%20GOVERNOR%20MOREHEAD%20SCHOOL>^[12]

Image Credit:

Governor Morehead School for Blind. Image available from the Department of Health and Human Services. Available from <http://www.ncoes.net/GMS.shtml>^[2] (accessed September 18, 2012).

Subjects:

Antebellum (1820-1861)^[26]

Education^[27]

Authors:

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Origin - location:

Wake County^[29]

Raleigh^[30]

From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.^[31]

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