

Adkin High School Walkout (1951) ^[1]

Adkin High School Walkout 1951 Kinston, NC

by the North Carolina Arts Council.

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Adkin High School opened in the fall of 1928 and graduated its last class in 1970.



Adkin High School, Kinston, NC (c.1928) -- was the only high school for African Americans in Lenoir County until 1951. Image from State Archives of North Carolina.

Adkin Road, in Kinston, is no longer used

as a school, but some of the building remains. Adkin was home to an outstanding band program, in which many of Kinston's present-day musicians received their training. Former students often recall excellent teachers at Adkin who helped shape their lives.

Adkin High School, located at 1216 Tower Hill


In 1951, students orchestrated a life-changing moment when they initiated a walkout at Adkin High School. Five seniors represented the high school's 720 students at a meeting with the school board, in which the students presented demands for greater educational resources. When the school board rejected their requests, the students executed a plan of action they had devised among themselves. They elected to keep it from their parents and teachers in order to protect them from potential repercussions.

It began when John Dudley made an announcement to his fellow students over the public address system: "Carolyn Coefield has lost her red pocketbook. If anyone has found it, please return it to the office." At this agreed-upon signal, every student in the school left the building, marched to Queen Street and on to a recreation center on East Bright Street, some carrying signs that read "Freedom," "Equal Rights," and "Education."

The demonstration received wide press coverage in eastern North Carolina. Within a year and a half, a new vocational building and new classrooms were built, a swimming pool installed, and the grounds expanded and landscaped to prevent flooding. The school also acquired a new gymnasium, the largest of any black high school in the state.

Members of the Class of 1952 are now scattered across the country, but in the fall of 2010 they celebrated the 59th anniversary of the demonstration by holding a reenactment of their march. The Rochelle Middle School principal Edwin Jones, brother of Nat Jones and alumnus of Adkin High, organized the reenactment. He told the Kinston Free Press, "We're doing this because it's a history lesson. It's been nearly 60 years since that remarkable act of bravery and foresight occurred. We want our community to know that we had leaders and 720 students who all stood up for what they thought was right."

This documentary video by Holly Holder, a resident and high school senior in Kinston at the time of the resource's creation in 2017, tells the story of the Adkin Walkout with images, interviews, and discussion by a historian.

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Update from N.C. Government & Heritage Library staff:

Dates of Adkin High School's opening and closing from "History of Adkin High School." Adkin Alumni & Friends.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20180831181813/http://adkinhighschoolkinston.org/history.html> (accessed May 11, 2022).

References

Bryan, Sarah, Beverly Bush Patterson, Michelle Lanier, and Titus Brooks Heagins. *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina*. (China, 2013), p. 35-37.

Additional Resources:

Holder, Holly. "Adkin High School Walkout Final." 2017. https://youtu.be/XUZnJ4_DanE ^[3] (accessed March 20, 2018).

Adkin High School 1951. <http://adkinhighwalkout.weebly.com/> ^[4] (accessed March 20, 2018).

Image Credit

Adkin High School (c. 1928). Southeast corner, Clay Street and East Washington Avenue, Lenoir County, Kinston, North Carolina. N_2003_11_24. State Archives of North Carolina.

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