

[ca. 1958, April 14]

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

(September 23, 1955 to April 14, 1958)

NASHVILLE
SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

by anna holden

To accompany

A First Step Toward School Integration

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CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN SCHOOL DESEGREGATION
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Suit Filed

- September 23, 1955 - Parents and guardians of twenty-one Negro children refused admission to neighborhood public schools file suit.
- December 15, 1955 - School suit amended to include two white children, also refused admission to neighborhood schools; the children, whose parents teach at Fisk University, live in a predominantly Negro neighborhood.

Preliminary Discussion and Planning

- February 6-7, 1956 - Twenty-seven community organizations sponsor Workshop on School Desegregation, with over 500 attending night sessions; participants in this second Desegregation Workshop report the community is "positively oriented toward the Supreme Court decision on desegregation of the public schools, but there is no active movement toward desegregation."
- March, 1956 - School board holds open meeting to adopt desegregation plan, instead invites 80 people present to give views; representatives of various groups speak for and against desegregation.
- March 21, 1956 - School board votes to postpone adopting desegregation plan until after court decision.
- March 27, 1956 - School case heard by Federal three-judge court; judges grant continuance in case, at board's request give board until fall term of court to present desegregation plan.
- May 30, 1956 - Nashville Community Relations Conference, newly formed bi-racial human relations organization, requests members to urge school officials to start desegregation in the fall.

October 29, 1956 - School board votes partial desegregation plan to be submitted to Federal district court; plan calls for desegregation of first grade, September, 1957, continued study of desegregation; race of students in school defined as valid condition for transfer.

Acceptance of Plan and Support

February 20, 1957 - Federal district court accepts school board plan with one change: board is ordered to bring in complete plan for desegregation of all grades by December 31, 1957, with a time schedule for accomplishing plan.

March 14, 1957 - School board passes resolution authorizing planning for desegregation, calls on "people of good will to join in its attempt to comply with court orders. . . ."

April 2, 1957 - Nashville Council of Parent-Teachers Associations adopts motion approving the board's school desegregation plan.

Increased Opposition

June 23, 1957 - Parents Preference Committee formed to spearhead drive to see that children go to school of parents' choice. This Plan would require three school systems - one Negro, one white and one integrated.

July 11, 1957 - Segregationist groups protest desegregation plans at school board meeting, ask board to use Tennessee 1957 public school assignment law.

July 30, 1957 - New school zones for first grade announced, new transfer system explained; Parents Preference Committee launches campaign to raise funds and secure signatures in fight for application of Tennessee's 1957 segregation laws to Nashville.

July 31, 1957 - Attorneys advise board to stick with plans for desegregation, say there is no way to skirt the order.

August 4, 1957 - White Citizens Council leader, John Kasper, and Ku Klux Klan hold rival meetings; Kasper moved from city park for not having permit, holds meeting with six other segregation figures in Croleywood on the outskirts of the city.

August 7, 1957 - Representatives of Parents Preference Committee appear at school board's instruction committee meeting, propose 5-point plan to substitute for fall desegregation.

August 8, 1957 - Segregationists, including Kasper, representatives of KKK, Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government, appear at school board meeting to protest integration; school board authorizes instruction committee to continue studying legal opinion on Parents Preference Committee request; Nashville Community Relations Conference and sixteen affiliated organizations, plus PTA assure board of support, present petition pledging support signed by 600 citizens.

August 10, 1957 - School officials announce they are making plans to inform parents of first graders about transfer procedures.

August 11, 1957 - Kasper rally attended by about 300; future meetings announced.

August 22, 1957 - Nashville Association of Churches mails letter to 350 clergymen asking them to deliver statements supporting desegregation to their congregations.

August 23, 1957 - Kiwanis Club adopts resolution opposing desegregation, Men's Club of Monroe Street Methodist Church votes similar resolution; school board instructs its attorneys to ask Federal court whether Tennessee's school preference law conflicts with court's desegregation order.

August 25, 1957 - Kasper, Ace Carter of Birmingham and other segregationists from Knoxville and Birmingham hold rally, drawing crowd of 250; Kasper announces nightly meetings downtown on courthouse steps; 28 of 62 ministers quizzed by Tennessean appealed to their congregations to maintain a Christian spirit in dealing with school integration problems.

Registration

August 27, 1957 - Thirteen Negro parents register children in neighborhood schools in special registration day for first-graders; forty-seven Negro parents transfer children out of assigned neighborhood zones to schools formerly designated as Negro schools; small groups of protestors gather at schools, but registration goes smoothly, with no incidents.

Parents who registered subject to threats and abusive telephone calls, also school officials and teachers.

August 28, 1957 - Group of 125 appears before Mayor to protest desegregation of schools; mayor, in first statement on school desegregation, says he must uphold the law of the land.

August 29, 1957 - Night meeting of 250 segregationists held on Buena Vista school grounds; boycott of schools urged.

September 4, 1957 - City teachers spend day in human relations workshop as part of in-service training; background on Nashville's situation presented by panel.

September 6, 1957 - Federal court rules Tennessee school preference law "unconstitutional on its face," instructs school board to proceed with desegregation as planned.

September 7, 1957 - Mayor West pledges "peace and quiet and good order;" Nashville Human Relations Conference reaffirms support of school board; segregationists hold fourth unauthorized meeting on school grounds at Fehr school.

September 8, 1957 - Police chief promises safety for all pupils, says persons causing disorder will be arrested.

School Opens

September 9, 1957 - Nineteen Negro children enter neighborhood schools, amid disorderly crowds of segregationists; in addition parents of four children attempt to revoke transfers to "Negro" schools. Three arrests made at Fehr school, where white women throw rocks and bottles. Neighborhoods in vicinity of schools where Negroes attend remain disorderly throughout day; near-riot broken up by police Monday night in Fehr school area--500 chase, throw bricks and bottles at Negroes, burn one Negro's car.

September 10, 1957 - Hattie Cotton school dynamited in early morning hours; crowds continue outside schools; police arrest 20 during day, including Kasper, in crack-down on segregationists; Negro hung in effigy in downtown area and disorder continues particularly in Fehr neighborhood; tool shed behind home of Mrs. Grace McKinley, whose daughter enrolled in Fehr, burned, rocks thrown at house.

September 11, 1957 - Schools remain under police guard with no crowds permitted to gather; Kasper put in county workhouse pending bond; city administration and U. S. court file for injunction against Kasper and other segregationists; carload of armed Negroes arrested.

September 12, 1957 - U. S. District Court issues temporary order restraining Kasper and eleven others from interfering with school desegregation; Kasper and follower John Mecurio arrested for vagrancy, loitering and disorderly conduct; cross burned in white residential area.

September 12, 1957 - State indicts Kasper for inciting to riot (earlier charges pressed by city); attendance rises and school officials announce crisis is over.

September 16, 1957 - District Judge William E. Miller issues permanent injunction ordering Kasper and nine others to refrain from interfering with school desegregation; children urged to return to school.

September 17, 1957 - Enrollment back up to 90% of total, with only eleven Negro children left in neighborhood schools; others go back to "Negro" schools.

September 18, 1957 - Kasper freed on bond, leaves city.

Aftermath of Crisis

September 26, 1957 - School Superintendent-elect Oliver states he can see "no advantage to the colored children in being allowed to attend formerly white schools. . . ."; says Negroes prefer segregation and "we were doing a better job with our city schools (before desegregation) than we could have done with both races together."

October 3, 1957 - Three PTA officers at Glenn school resign because of integration and Glenn Men's Club disbands.

October 10, 1957 - Donald Davidson and representatives of the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government appear before school board to plea for adoption of "voluntary" integration plan; Kasper back, ruled vagrant by circuit court.

October 14-23, 1957 - Series of cross burnings at different points in city; one burned in front of McKinley home, where Negro child is still in neighborhood school.

Next Step?

December 4, 1957 - School board adopts Parents Preference Committee's "voluntary" integration plan to present to Federal court; says will test state school segregation laws to "clear the air."

January 20, 1958 - School board files petition to dismiss original suit on grounds that 1957 Tennessee school assignment law provides plaintiffs with adequate administrative remedy.

January 28, 1958 - Federal district Judge Miller hears arguments supporting "voluntary" integration plan presented by school board; school superintendent Oliver, sole witness at hearing, says nine Negro children remain in neighborhood schools, are satisfied and doing well.

February 13, 1958 - Parents Preference Committee files amicus curiae brief stating outright desegregation of schools would be "preferential treatment of Negro pupils."

February 18, 1958 - Judge Miller disapproves parent preference plan, orders school board to submit "suitable plan" by April 7; new hearing scheduled April 14.

March 13, 1958 - Parents Preference Committee petitions schoolboard to refuse to submit any integration plan (which had been requested by the Federal District Court). Anna Holden presents to school board the stand of 26 Nashville organizations favoring desegregation of the entire public school system as of September 1958.

March 16, 1958 - Jewish Community Center is damaged by dynamite. Its Rabbi and Federal Judge Miller are threatened. Both the bombing and the threats thought to be protest of integration stand.

March 31, 1958 - School board votes to desegregate rest of system one grade a year, with only opposing vote cast by the lone Negro member of the board who stated that the plan violates the Supreme Court requirement for all deliberate speed. A number of organizations and churches, over and above the 26 stating their views on March 13th, ask for complete desegregation in September, 1958. The Nashville Branch of NAACP announces it would contest the legality of any one-grade-a-year plan.

April 14, 1958 - Federal District Court hearing on the school board's one-grade-a-year plan held. Judge Miller allows 24 days for the school board to file its brief in support of the plan and for the NAACP to file a brief in opposition.