



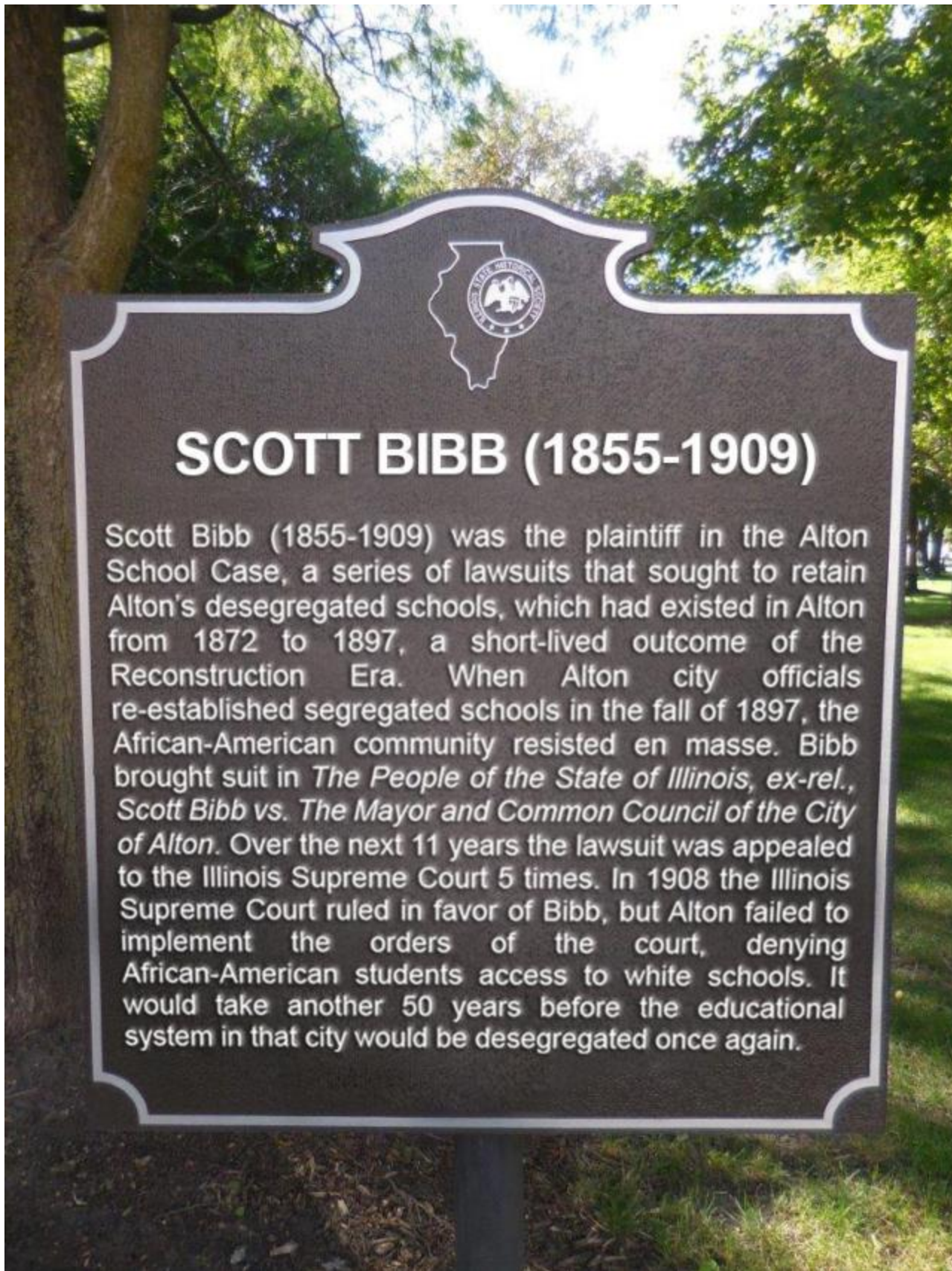
Alton's Black History: Scott Bibb School Case

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
February 1 2018 12:25 PM

ALTON - Some may be surprised to hear Alton had desegregated schools from 1872-1897, due to the fact modern integration did not occur until the 1940s.

In fact, Scott Bibb, who moved to Missouri in 1863 with his family, wanted an integrated education for his children. When the city segregated the schools again, ironically naming the schools for black children after noted abolitionists Elijah P. Lovejoy and Frederick Douglas, Bibb led a legal charge to the Illinois Supreme Court. His case to integrate schools again for his children to receive an equal education was backed by the local black community, which resisted segregation heavily when Alton brought it back.

That lawsuit was appealed for 11 years until the Illinois Supreme Court eventually did side with Bibb. By that point, however, his children were too old for the grades in which they were placed, and his daughter was harassed by students and staff until she eventually quit. In fact, Alton did not implement this rule, and it would take an entire 50 years for the educational system in Alton to be desegregated again.



In his entry in *20th Century African American Leaders*, by the Committee on Black Pioneers in the Alton Museum of History and Art, it states Bibb was employed as a firefighter at the glass factory.

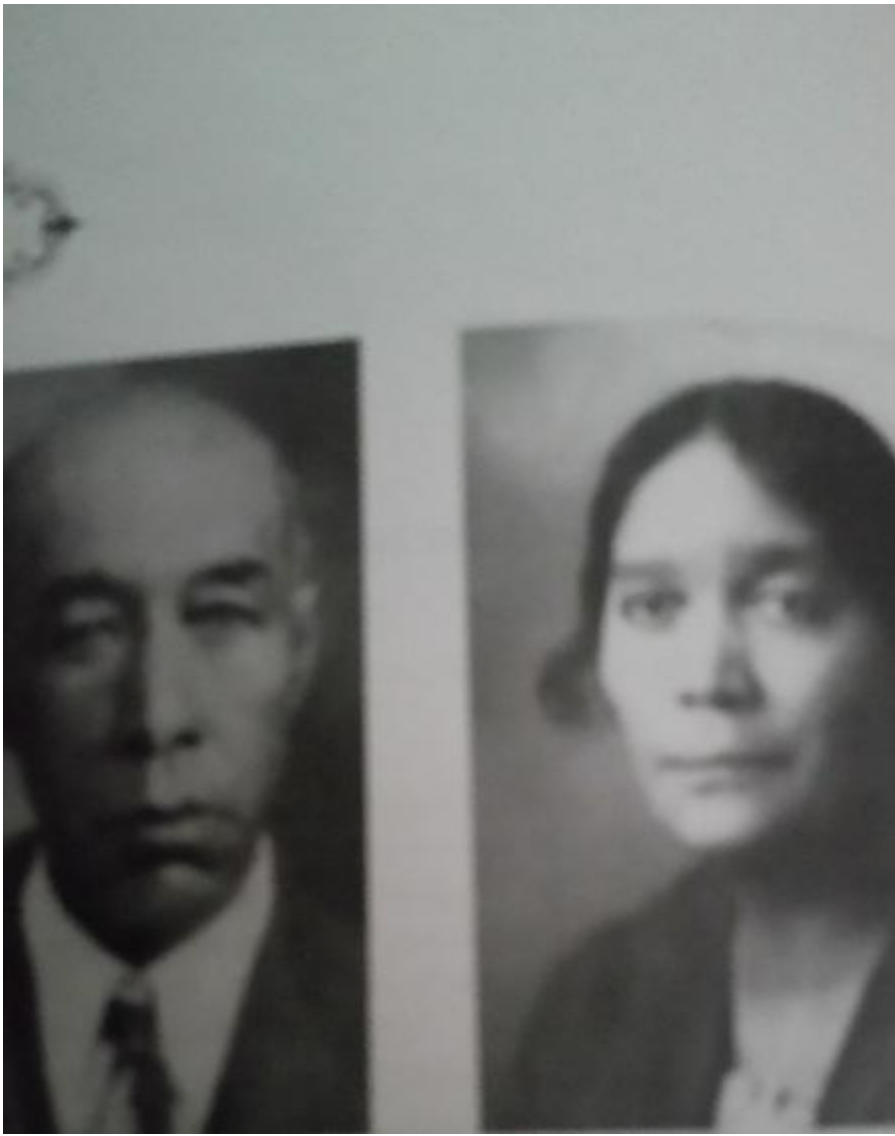
It also states the City of Alton secretly planned the two schools for black students in 1895. This would allow for the employment of black teachers with the complete segregation of students. Prior to that, students were integrated, but only under the instruction of white teachers.

Despite the ruling and community support, Alton schools were not fully integrated until the Elijah Conley and NAACP lawsuit of the 1940s.

Bibb was not alone in his struggle for integration, however. He was joined by many in the community, including Harry B. and Mary Sadie Coates.

Harry Coates was born in Alton in 1872, and received his education within the Alton School System while it was integrated. He worked as a dining car waiter for the Wabash Railroad and as a mail carrier. He was made trustee of the Lovejoy Association in the 1900s. He served as president of the citizens committee for the Bibb lawsuit. He was also an active member of Union Baptist Church, United Brothers of Friendship and the Mail Carriers National Association.

His wife Sadie Coates was employed as an elementary school teacher in the Alton School System. She served on the citizen's committee for the Scott Bibb School Case, and was one of eight members of the Temperance Committee of the Wood River Baptist Association.



Eugene Drew, a personal friend of Bibb's older brother, Ambrose Bibb, recieved his education in the Alton School System from 1868-1878, when the schools had been integrated. Because of that relationship, Drew became interested in the Scott Bibb School Case. He became the first chairman, and then served as secretary of that citizens committee.

Drew wrote a column for the *Illinois Record* newspaper, which gave details on the committee's efforts on behalf of the case.

Outside of his work for school integration, Drew worked as a stonecutter and real estate investor. He was a member of the United Brotherhood of Friendship and Union Baptist Church.



The pastor of that church, James Henry McGee, was employed by the school system to teach school held in that church. He was the first teacher for Drew, and led several fundraising efforts on behalf of that citizens committee.

In 1906, McGee worked with the state printer's office and founded the Ambidexter Institute in Springfield, Illinois. He still maintained contact with Altonians to establish

integrated schools through the Scott Bibb School Case. In 2016, the Scott Bibb Center in Alton was named to honor that historic case. It was built and is utilized by Lewis and Clark Community College, and is currently home to the Alton Community Relations Commission.