

City of Goldsboro

Little Known Black History Fact

John Morton-Finney

John Morton-Finney was a true Renaissance man, earning an impressive 11 degrees during his lifetime. The former Buffalo Soldier Army man and educator is also considered by some historians the longest-serving lawyer of all time.

Morton-Finney was born to a former slave father and a free mother in Kentucky. The parents taught their seven children the value of education which served the young man well early on. He joined the U.S. Army and became a member of the 24th Infantry Regiment, better known as the Buffalo Soldiers. Morton-Finney fought twice, first in the Philippines and once more in World War I.

Honorably discharged after his first tour, Morton-Finney earned the first of his degrees from Lincoln College in Missouri. When the great war began, he donned the uniform once more and fought for the American Expeditionary Force in France. Morton-Finney was teaching at a one-room schoolhouse at that time, and he returned to the States and earned several degrees in math, French, and history.

Morton-Finney met and fell in love with Lincoln College teacher Pauline Ray after taking her class. The pair wed in 1922 and relocated to Indianapolis, where Morton-Finney taught at the all-Black Crispus Attucks High School. Morton-Finney was head of the school's foreign language departments and was responsible for encouraging several children to pursue higher education.

While teaching at Crispus Attucks in 1935, Morton-Finney earned the first of four law degrees. He was also a voracious reader, often reading three or four titles at a time, according to accounts. In an interview on his 100th birthday, he said that he believed that there was no end to learning.

At 75, Morton-Finney earned the last of his several degrees from Butler University. He practiced law until he was 107 years old, besting **Rush Limbaugh Sr.**, the Missouri attorney and father of the conservative pundit of the same name.

Morton-Finney passed in 1998. In 2000, the Indianapolis Public Schools Board honored Morton-Finney's 47 years as a teacher by renaming the Center for Educational Services to the Dr. John Morton-Finney Center for Educational Services. Other honors include a residential house named for him on Indiana University's Purdue campus in 2014.

