



Student Name:
Class Period:
Date:

Meet the Originals

Texas Originals is a radio series about people who made an impact on Texas. You can hear it online and on radio stations around the state. Read or listen to the episode on Mary Elizabeth Branch. Then, answer questions about it.

Mary Elizabeth Branch 1881–1944

In 1930, Austin's Tillotson College stood on the brink of collapse. The historically Black school, founded in 1881, had dwindled to just five dilapidated buildings and fewer than seventy students. It took the determination of Mary Elizabeth Branch to save the institution.

Branch was born in Virginia in 1881. Her parents were formerly enslaved, and their fervent belief in education shaped her career. After completing high school, Branch became an English teacher and school administrator; in the summers she continued her studies, eventually receiving degrees from the University of Chicago.

In 1930, Branch moved to Austin to take charge of Tillotson. She led efforts to clean up the grounds and raised funds to build new buildings. She expanded the library, hired new faculty, and gave scholarships to top students. A visitor during those years described the campus as “full of the thrill of something being done.” Branch soon became the only African American female president of an institution accredited by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges.

During these years, Branch also worked on the national stage. She helped found the United Negro College Fund and served on the Advisory Board of the National Youth Administration.

Branch passed away in 1944, but her leadership restored Tillotson College’s vitality and enabled its merger with Samuel Huston College. Today, Huston-Tillotson University enrolls over one thousand students.

Check for Understanding: Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on Mary Elizabeth Branch. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. What was Mary Elizabeth Branch's background, prior to coming to Texas?
2. Name three of the things that Austin did to improve Tillotson College.

Going Further: Write or discuss your answer to the question below, supporting your answer with evidence from the episode or additional information you have learned in class.

3. **Taking a Position.** Why do you think that Branch chose to improve the physical look of the campus, in addition to improving the academics?