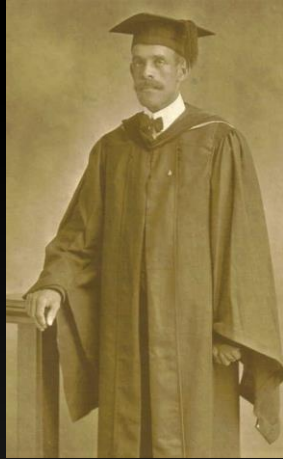


The Impact of Educators of Color: Lexington's First Black Schools (1865-1965)

Eric Wilson, Rockbridge Historical Society



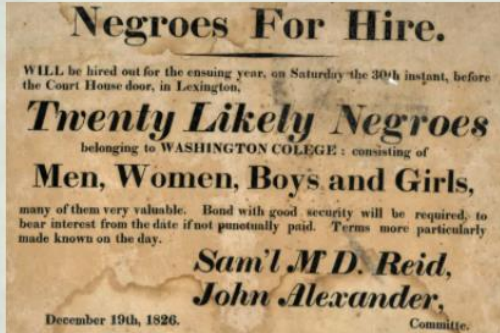
SEVENTH GRADE - Sponsor: Mrs. Laura Etta P. Gilmore



Local Black Histories: Virtual Access, Lasting Archive

As our e-Newsletters roll out this series in the coming months, please check back in to see what new materials we've added. You can click hotlinks to access sites, or download full articles. Please [Contact Us](#) with your Questions, or suggestions for additions, or to add join the email list for latest releases, additions, and notice of relevant events.

Note: Resources with an * have been produced in conjunction with RHS Programs or Publications.



Series Overview

*Eric Wilson, [Local Black Histories: Virtual Access, Lasting Archive](#)

Free Blacks & Slavery in Rockbridge, Virginia

*David Coffey, [Patrick Henry, Free Man of Color: Caretaker of Thomas Jefferson's Natural Bridge](#)

Turk McCleskey, [The Road to Black Ned's Forge: A Story of Race, Sex, and Trade on the Colonial American Frontier](#) (+ video lecture)

Ted DeLaney, [John Chavis: Soldier, Minister, Educator & America's First African American College Student, at Washington College](#): (+ 3 min audio profile)

Melvin Patrick Ely, [Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Freedom from 1790 to the Civil War](#) (+ radio interview)

*Fitzhugh Brundage, [Attitudes towards Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County](#)

Neely Young, [Ripe for Emancipation: Rockbridge and Anti-Slavery from Revolution to Civil War](#)

*Charles Dew, [Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge](#)

Larry Spurgeon, [Stonewall Jackson's Slaves](#)

*Eric Wilson, [Re-Visiting a Rockbridge Icon: Archer Alexander's Journeys as a Local Slave, a Self-Emancipated War Hero, as a National Monument](#)

Journeys to Juneteenth

*Eric Wilson, [Journeys to Juneteenth](#)

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. & PBS, [What is Juneteenth?](#)

New York Times Interactive, [How We Juneteenth](#)

[Juneteenth Art Show 2020](#): Project Horizon and Nelson Gallery



Aspects of Black Religious and Educational Development in Lexington, Virginia, 1840-1928

Theodore C. DeLaney, Jr.



WRITING in the *Negro History Bulletin* in 1939, Carter G. Woodson, a noted black educator, stated, "A definitive history of the Negro Church . . . would leave practically no phase of the history of the Negro in America untouched."¹ This quote provided great inspiration for me as I searched for a place to begin the task of compiling a history of black people in the Lexington area. The history which follows is by no means complete but represents a mere scratch of the surface.

The churches in Lexington which date from ante-bellum days all have histories which included attempts at slave evangelization. While such evan-

Theodore C. DeLaney, Jr., was a technical assistant in the Biology Department at Washington and Lee University at the time he made his address at the First Baptist Church in Lexington on January 26, 1981. He revised his paper for this publication in 1989, while a graduate student in history at the College of William and Mary. He is the great-grandson of the architect, contractor, and builder of the Randolph Street Methodist Church.

LYLBURN DOWNING SCHOOL

IS LISTED IN THE

NATIONAL REGISTER
OF HISTORIC PLACES

BY THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

1927-1965

RHS Local Black Histories

RockbridgeHistory.org



1960 Lylburn Downing Faculty: School Library

Principal U.B. Broadneaux, Sr. , Rev. L.L. Downing (Portrait)



Lylburn Downing Class of 1961

Pictured ca. 1957, with Mr. James Lyle, Sr.

Downing School Pictures from [*Lylburn Downing Alumni 1928-1965*](#)



Lylburn Downing High School, 1965

**Last Graduating Class
Last School Faculty (rear)**



Randolph St. Schoolhouse, 1865-1927 (Methodist Church, left)
variously known as Central School, Freedmen's School, Lexington Colored Graded School

The strange saga of an old public school for blacks

The first public school for black students here was first a white school, then a smallpox hospital, then a house, and finally, a place of learning again.

There's nothing left of it, and no marker to show just where it was or what it meant to the community.

But back before the Civil War, there was a small school house near the old church on Randolph Street. It was the first school here known as the "Central School." It was built in 1819, abandoned, sold, used as a house, abandoned again, and after a few twists and turns, used once again as a school.

During the war, for a few months, what had been the Central School became a smallpox hospital.

It was then sold to a woman who said she bought it as an investment with money she'd saved from her job as a "matron" at Rockbridge Alum Springs.

After the war, the Freedmen's Bureau rented the building for use as a school for black children.

And while the Bureau was running that school, the community it served was raising money to ensure there would still be a school for black children once the Bureau was gone.

There is not much of a paper trail documenting those fundraising efforts. There is one small piece: a bill from September, 1868. It's for 16 dozen eggs, three pounds of sugar, 2 1/2 pounds of raisins, and \$3 worth of candy that were apparently used to raise money.

And there are some notations in an old ledger: "February 19, 1873, Proceeds of festival: \$75.

it was abandoned as a school for white children. But in January, 1860, he sold it to the mayor and town council "during the prevalence of smallpox in the Town of Lexington ... for a hospital."

The folks who were quarantined in the hospital were a "Mr. Hillis" and his whole family. They "had had the small pox, and he would not remain in it, for nobody would go to see him," said one witness. So, in October of the same year, with the smallpox epidemic apparently under control, the property was sold to the church next door, which almost immediately sold it to William Rhodes and several others. (One of Rhodes' partners in the venture was the mayor.)

The partners didn't keep it for very long — just long enough to sell it to Jane Cobb in 1863 for \$850, and long enough to be sued.

When the partners sold it to Cobb, it was occupied by a blacksmith, a man named Peyton Suthard. He sued in an attempt to overturn the sale. He won an injunction, but lost the battle.

Suthard claimed he was lured to town "at the urgent solicitation" of Rhodes, a carriage maker, "who said he felt bound in gratitude to do something for him and his daughter, the half-sister of [Rhodes]. Suthard had married Rhodes' mother after her husband died, and helped rear her children. Before moving to Lexington, Suthard was living in "the lower end of the Valley, and was doing as well as could be expected with his very moderate means."

Rhodes moved Suthard and his family into the old school, which he described as "a small one story house with but two rooms, one fireplace in one of them, and a few outdoor conveniences. The garden was grown up with brush, the fences were ready to fall down." The house had been a school.

"About the time the war broke out," Suthard said, he was ready to go back home, but Rhodes talked him into staying and gave him a job as a collier. Suthard said he had

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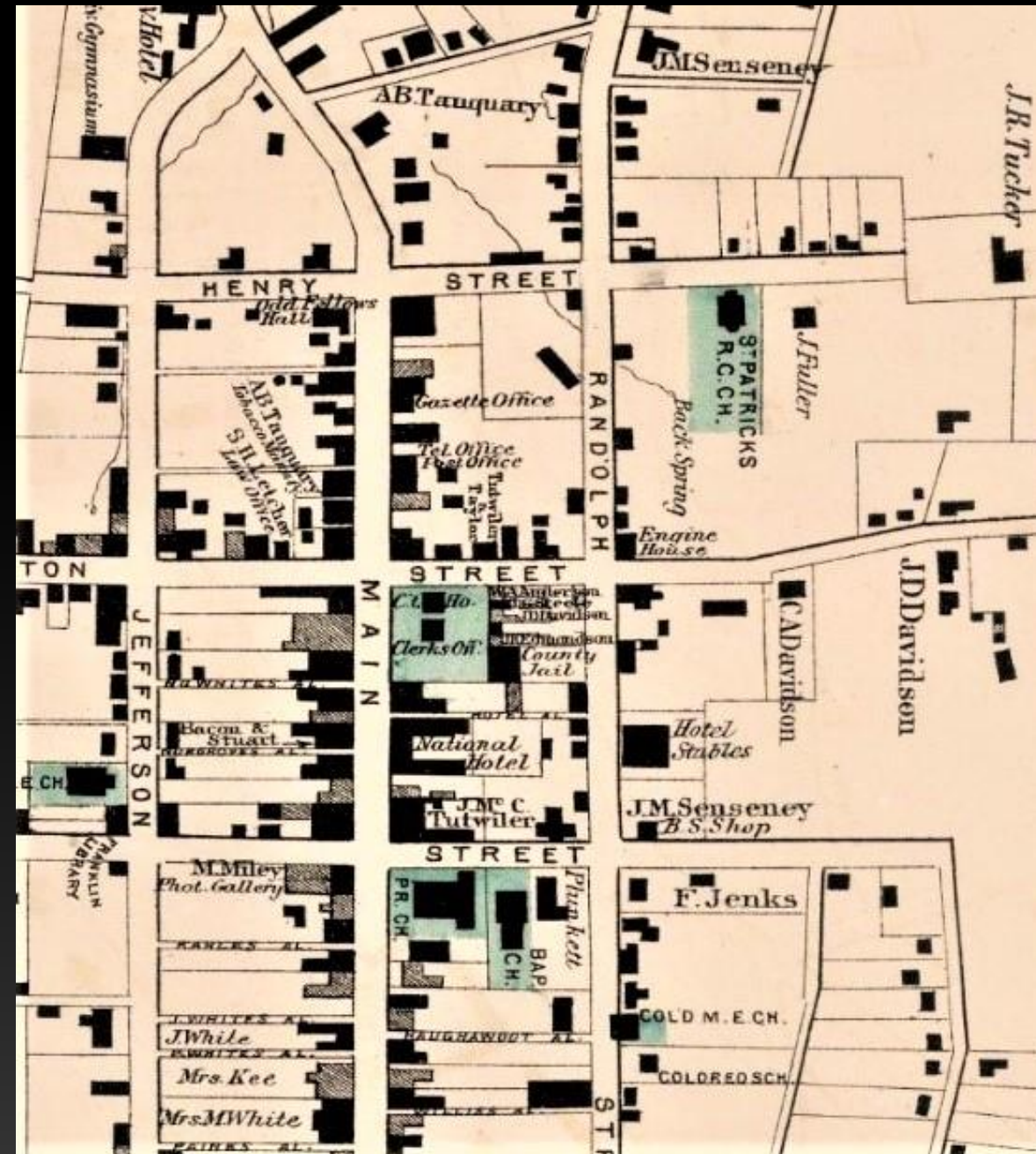
Lexington, 1877 (Gray's Map)

At bottom, S. Randolph Street:

Colored School (est. 1865)

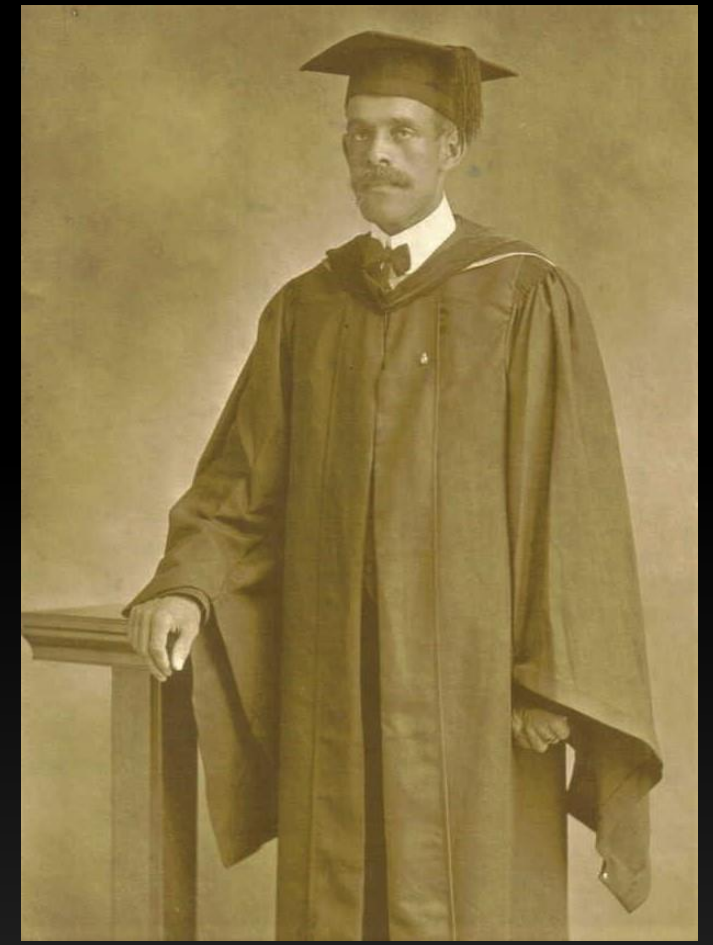
Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (1865)

(Randolph St. United Methodist Church)





The following teachers were elected for the colored schools : William Washington, Jr. re-elected principal, with Charles S. Harper, Henrietta C. Evans, and Nannie Clay as teachers. The principal, William Washington, Jr., served acceptably in that capacity the latter part of last session, filling out the term of Isaiah Bolen. He is a graduate of Oberlin College, Ohio. Charles S. Harper, the new teacher, is a native of Lexington, but has recently been in Philadelphia. He is a graduate of Lincoln College, and also of the normal department of Morgan College, Baltimore. The other two teachers have been in the school for some years.



Lexington Natives, School Alumni, New Faculty: 1902

William Washington (left, b.1872; Oberlin) & Charles Harper (b.1880; Lincoln U)
Join veteran teachers Henrietta Evans & Nannie Clay on Randolph St.



Rev. William Washington, B.A. Oberlin College, 1900

Top, 2nd from Right: Orations on *Frederick Douglass* and *Educating the Laboring Class*:
“won the highest honor ever won by a colored student in any northern institution,” *Rich. Times*

DR. JOHN R. FRANCIS, President
1102 9th St. N. W.

The Colored Social Settlement

H. E. WILLIAMS, Treasurer
U. S. Weather Bureau

NO. 16 L STREET, SOUTHWEST

The Neighborhood



Trustees

Advisory Board

- Dr. John R. Francis, President
- Miss Elizabeth Brown
- Dr. Sara Brown
- Mrs. R. C. Bruce
- Prof. G. W. Cook
- Mrs. Anna J. Cooper
- Rev. F. J. Grimke, D. D.
- Mrs. Georgia D. Hawkins
- Rev. William J. Howard, D. D.
- Dr. Thomas Jesse Jones
- Mr. Samuel Middleton
- Mrs. L. B. Moore
- Mrs. Mary Church Terrell
- Mr. James E. Walker
- Mr. H. E. Williams

- Judge William DeLacy
- Mrs. John Hay
- Mrs. Elizabeth C. Hobson
- Mrs. Archibald Hopkins
- Mrs. John R. McLean
- Mr. Geo. M. Oyster, Jr.
- Rev. John Van Schaick
- Rev. W. P. Thirkield
- Mrs. E. B. Thompson
- Dr. Walter S. Ufford



Alley Blocks in Black.

Death Rate 1909:
White 17 per thousand
Black 33 per thousand

South Washington

Washington, D. C.

APR 18 1912

MISS ELLA HAWES, Headworker
Acting Head Worker.
MRS. M. G. DILLARD,
Associate Worker.



Playground in Yard



Girls' Sewing Club Under Direction of Mrs. Fernandis

Glimpses of the Work of the Social Settlement

Washington, D. C.

From Lexington to the Nation's Capital

William Washington: Head of D.C. Colored Social Settlement

Board Members: Luminary Educators, Suffragists, NAACP Founders

CATALOGUE OF
HOWARD
UNIVERSITY

FOR THE YEAR 1905-1906



INCORPORATED, MARCH 2, 1867

WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY :: MDCCCXVI

their expenses by work in the city. Washington affords unusual opportunities for self help. No energetic student need be deprived of the advantages offered by the school because of lack of opportunity. As an encouragement to thorough preparation for the work of the School of Theology, college graduate students of promise, who may need it, are furnished \$72. Two Pomeroy scholarships—one of \$75 and one of \$50—are awarded for excellence in Biblical studies. Two Maynard prizes—one of \$10 and one of \$5 are awarded for superiority in public debate.

The Washington Presbytery holds and administers funds for the aid of Presbyterian students.

The awards for the year 1907-1908 were as follows: The Pomeroy Scholarship was divided equally between Charles S. Harper, William V. Mitchell, and Edward E. Tyler. The first Maynard prize was awarded to General W. Dickens, the second to Fairfax King.

Rev. Charles Harper (Lincoln U, Morgan State, Howard U)

Degrees from Lincoln Univ. & Morgan State; Returned for Advanced Degrees in Theology: Howard Univ, B.D., 1908: Pomeroy Prize in Biblical Studies; Lincoln Univ., M.A., 1914

Lexington Colored Graded School

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

Robert Lee Clark

having completed the prescribed Course of Study for

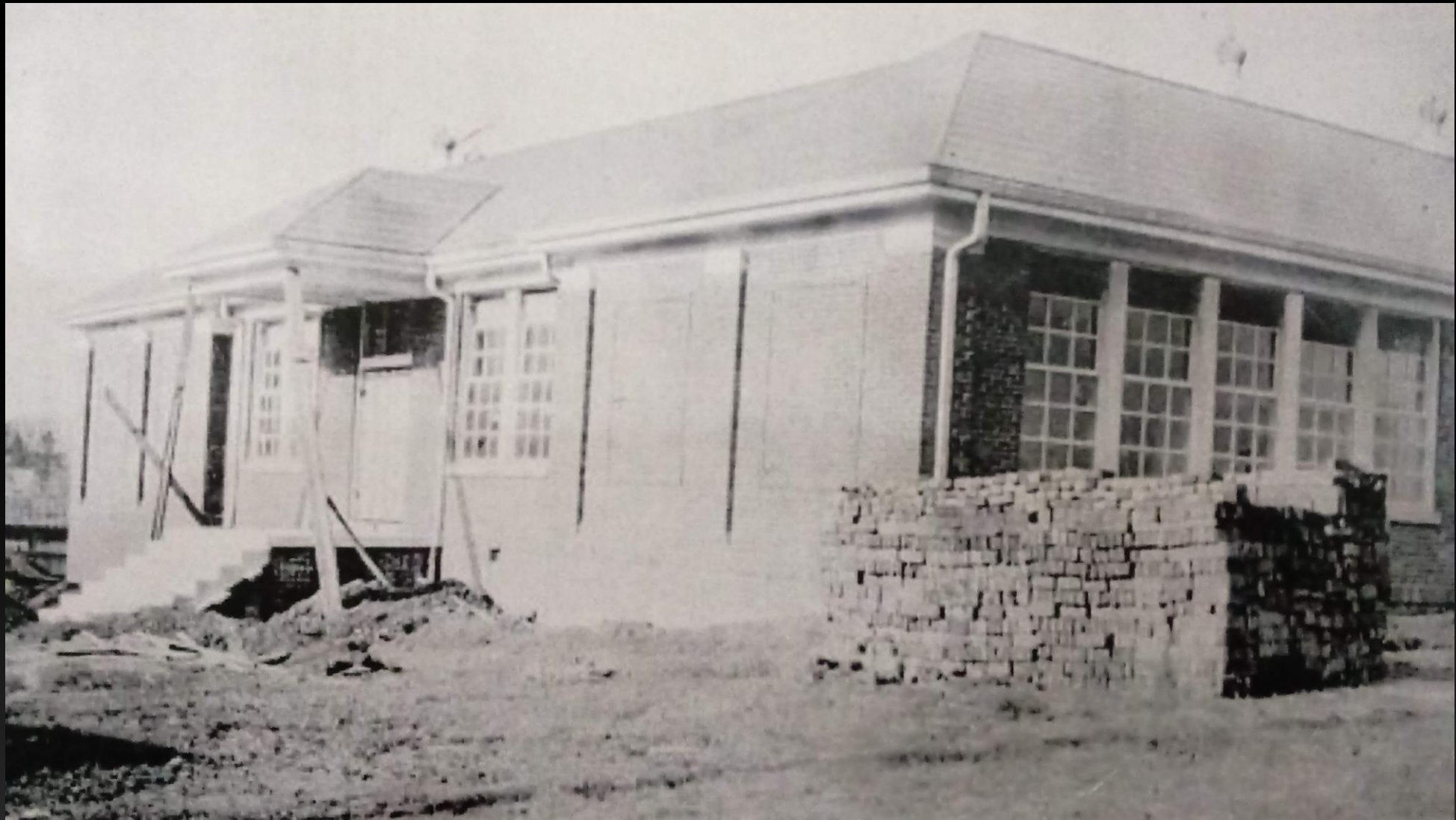
Grammar Grades in this School is hereby declared a Graduate of the Lexington Colored Graded School.

In testimony whereof this Certificate is now presented to him

Given at Lexington, Virginia, this 12th day of May, 1914

W. K. P. Harris, Principal

Robert Lee Clark: 1914 Diploma, Grammar Grades (RHS Collections)



Lexington Finances New School for Black Students, Diamond St.
Dedication and Speech by Rev. Lylburn L. Downing Sep. 1927

Lexington School Board Minutes

1920 Scale of Salaries + Bonuses

5 Black Faculty at "Col'd Sch." (Randolph St.)

10 White Faculty (all "Miss": HS + Grade School)

Mrs. H. White, Music (\$400)

Principal Harrington Waddell (\$2600)

Courtesy, Ted DeLaney

Lylburn Downing Alumni Digital Archive, 1928-1965

Lexington School Bd. Record Book - Trustees Meetings 123
5 May 1920

The Board ordered a bonus to be paid the teachers for the present session and fixed the scale of salaries for the next session as given in the following list of teachers with the amounts after each name:

		Bonus 1919-20	Salary 1920-21
	H. Waddell, Prin	\$175.00	\$2600. per yr.
H.S.	Miss Richeson	95 64.00	110.00 " "
	" Carter	60.00	104.00 " "
	" Rowe	60.00	104.00 " "
	" Drame	90 60.00	104.00 " "
	" Varner	80 52.00	92.00 " "
G.S.	" Dunlap	75 44.00	86.00 " "
	" Wiley	70 45.00	86.00 " "
	" Pustou	75 49.00	86.00 " "
	" Pendleton	45.00	86.00 " "
	" Grose class	85 56.00	101.00 " "
Col'd Sch.	Mrs. Rowland	55 17.50	60.00 " "
	Sama Price	40 17.50	45.00 " "
	Kissie Banks	40 17.50	45.00 " "
	Nellie White	40 17.50	45.00 " "
	Margaret Brown	40 17.50	45.00 " "
	Mrs. H. White music teacher		\$400 per yr.

✓ = accepted

Adjourned. H. Waddell, Clerk.
Agnes Adair 46.00 per mo. Lucy Lindsey 80.00
Francis Glasgow 93.00 " "

Petition to the Lexington School Board to Permit the Hiring of a Teacher at Lylburn Downing to Teach the Third Year of High School

This is to certify that we the undersigned parents of the pupils who completed the work at the Lylburn Downing last June, have agreed to pay a teacher for the school year 1932-33 if we can get another year advance work.

We have agreed to have the sum of \$55.00 collected in advance, and turned over by our chairman to the School Board. The teacher to be under the supervision of the Board as the others.

We will appreciate the Board granting us this request as it is needed now as never before, because of the inability during these times to send our children elsewhere.

Please let us know the cost of equipment in consideration for the advanced year requested, and we will try to

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Please let us know the cost of equipment in consideration for the advanced year requested, and we will try to meet the demand. We will do anything cheaper than sending our children away.

Signed:

Sylvester Evans
Mrs. H. L. Walker
James Coleman
Roxie Hughes

P.S. The above agreement is to finding to amount of \$5.00 per person.

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Roxie Hughes

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Building Further: Downing Parents in Action

Volunteering Private Funds to Hire Another HS Grade, 1932

Trial Integration: Fall 1964

10 years after Brown v. Board

Approved by Virginia Pupil Placement Board:

3 pupils to enter Ann Smith Elementary School

1 transfer from Downing to Central School

2 transfers from Downing to Lexington High School

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17, 1964

Locality One Of Eleven:

State Board Sets First Integration In Schools Here

Rockbridge County will be one of 11 school districts in the state beginning racial integration of the public schools for the first time this fall, according to assignments approved last week by the State Pupil Placement Board.

Applications for placement of six Negro pupils in previously all-white schools here had been forwarded to the state board by local school authorities with the recommendation that they be favorably acted upon.

The state board approved the assignments as follows: three pupils to enter the first grade at Ann Smith School in Lexington; one pupil to transfer from Lyburn Downing School to the fifth grade at Central School; and two pupils to transfer from Lyburn

Downing School to Lexington High School.

The other localities which will be experiencing integration for the first time in September are Wytbe, Bath, Halifax, Gloucester, Page and Rockingham counties, and the cities of Bristol, Norton, Suffolk and Harrisonburg.

The state board also gave its approval to a plan whereby Giles County becomes the first state locality to have total integration of all public schools. Giles will close its two Negro schools and the 131 Negro pupils will be transferred to other schools. The county has a total school population of 4,500.

Pre-Trial Meet



Lylburn Downing High School, 1965

Last Graduating Class with Last School Faculty (rear)

440 Total Black Students in Grade & High School at Desegregation from Lex, Rock., BV

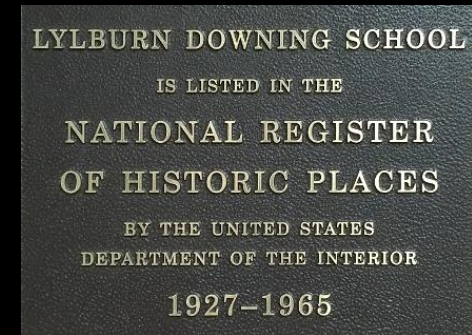


JUN • 66

Natural Bridge Elementary School, 1965-6

First Year of School Integration, Rockbridge County

Ms. Anne McAlphin, 4th Grade Class



Diamond-Green Hill Historical Walking Tour & Lylburn Downing School History Scavenger Hunt

Waddell Elementary School & Lylburn Downing Middle School Projects (2015 →)
First Baptist Church, Lylburn Downing Alumni Room~LCS School Board Room

Panelist-Educators:

Gloria Denise (Jones) Smith

Stanley Land

Debbie Funkhouser

Charlotte Alexander

Preston Evans

Q&A