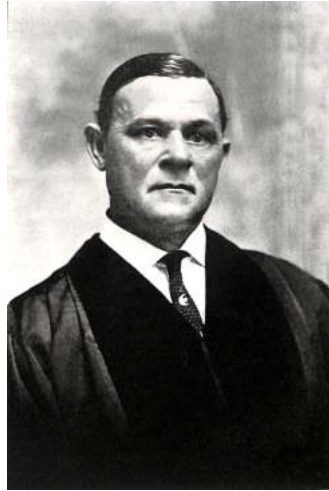


CHAPTER 3

REV. DR. LYLURN LIGGINS DOWNING



83

L. L. Downing

Rev. Lylburn Downing assumed the pastorate of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church on July 8, 1894⁸⁴, however, his official installation service was not held until June 28, 1896.⁸⁵ Rev. Downing, like Rev. Twine before him, was a graduate of Lincoln University. He would go on to lead this congregation for more than 42 years.

Lylburn Liggins Downing was born in Lexington, Virginia on May 3, 1862 to enslaved parents. His father Lilburn Downing was born in the St. Augustine/Jacksonville area of Florida sometime between 1821 and 1823,⁸⁶ this would have been around the time the Adams-Onis Treaty went into effect (on July 17, 1821) in which Spain ceded Florida to the United States. Rev. Downing always spelled his father's name as "Lilburn."⁸⁷ Lilburn was a slave in the household of Governor James McDowell,⁸⁸ serving the family in Richmond while McDowell was Governor, and later in Charlottesville and Lexington⁸⁹ before McDowell died in 1851. On the May 30, 1852 inventory of McDowell's estate "Lilbourn" age 30 is valued at \$850.00, more than any of the other 26 slaves. Lilburn then served in the household of McDowell's daughter Sophonisba Breckinridge McDowell, wife of Col. James Woods Massie of VMI.⁹⁰

⁸³ George Davis photo.

⁸⁴ *Twenty-fifth Anniversary, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, Sunday, October 5, 1919*, booklet, page 3.

⁸⁵ Original bulletin, "Dedication of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church and Installation of its Pastor," June 21, 28, 1896.

⁸⁶ *Lincoln University, College and Theological Seminary, Biographical Catalogue, 1918*, PA.

⁸⁷ Personal correspondence between Rev. Downing and Col. Joseph R. Anderson, VMI Historiographer, October 18, 1927.

⁸⁸ *The Lexington Gazette*, Lexington, VA, Jul. 26, 1905, "Unique Memorial to Stonewall Jackson."

⁸⁹ Correspondence between Rev. Downing and Col. Joseph R. Anderson, VMI Historiographer, October 18, 1927.

⁹⁰ *One Hundred Years at VMI, Vol. III*, page 227, footnote. Information from Joel T. Park, personal correspondence Jan. 27, 2019.

Lilburn Downing was, for about 25 years⁹¹, a hospital steward at Virginia Military Institute and was with the VMI cadets at the Battle of New Market.⁹² There is a record of Lilburn serving under the direction of Dr. Howard T. Barton at VMI until the doctor's resignation in 1870 following the death of his famous patient, General Robert E. Lee.⁹³

Rev. Downing was familiar with two of the VMI doctors, Sinclair and Barton. He wrote: "I believe my father was faithful and to a certain degree efficient. I have seen my father open the anteroom door and cadets [would] go into the [doctor's] office, the doctor being absent. He [Lilburn] would either prescribe [or] send the cadet to the hospital."⁹⁴

The mother of Rev. Downing was named Ellen (or Ella) Harvey, born in Lexington in 1831.⁹⁵ She and her children were slaves in the household of David L. Hopkins, a wealthy Lexington merchant. In 1853 Hopkins and Col. Massie approved a slave marriage between Lilburn and Ellen,⁹⁶ with both using the Downing surname. David L. Hopkins died of typhoid fever on September 29, 1865, less than six months after the end of the Civil War. His burial was in the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery. On the 1870 Lexington census Ella and her children were still living in the Hopkins household, with Frances Louisa Hopkins as the head-of-household.

From the 1870 and 1880 Lexington census records it would appear that Lilburn and Ellen had a large family, all boys. These included: Robert Garland [born May 11, 1855 – birth name: Ro. Garland Downing]; Henry Clay or Clay Henry [born July 1857 – birth name: Henry Clay Hopkins]; William [born 1859]; Lylburn [born May 3, 1862 – birth name: Lilburn Hopkins, mother listed as "Virginia"]; Sherman B. [born 1863]; Charles [born 1868] and Gardner Paxton [born April 22, 1871]. By the mid-1920s all of the brothers, except for Rev. Downing, were dead.⁹⁷

Downing's brother, Sherman B. Downing, graduated from The Wayland Seminary, Normal Department, in Washington, DC on May 21, 1884.⁹⁸ Apparently he remained in the Washington area because he is shown as a "Lay Reserve Delegate" representing Washington at the Methodist Episcopal General Conference held at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City during the first part of May 1888.

By the age of 16, Gardner Paxton Downing, another brother, was living in Austin, Texas. City Directory records indicate that he resided there from 1887 to 1892 working as live-in help for several households. He returned to Lexington where he began teaching school in Rockbridge County as early as 1900.⁹⁹ Gardner, by 1907¹⁰⁰ was living with his brother, Lylburn, and teaching school in Roanoke. He returned to Austin to spend the

⁹¹ Correspondence between Rev. Downing and Col. Joseph R. Anderson, VMI Historiographer, October 18, 1927.

⁹² *The Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, Jul. 29, 1915; *Rockbridge County News*, Sep. 22, 1927

⁹³ William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI, Vol. 3*, 1939, page 227, footnote.

⁹⁴ Correspondence between Rev. Downing and Col. Joseph R. Anderson, VMI Historiographer, November 8, 1927.

⁹⁵ *Lincoln University, College and Theological Seminary, Biographical Catalogue, 1918*, PA

⁹⁶ *Lincoln University, College and Theological Seminary, Biographical Catalogue, 1918*, PA

⁹⁷ Correspondence between Rev. Downing and Col. Joseph R. Anderson, VMI Historiographer, October 18, 1927.

⁹⁸ *The Evening Star*, Washington, DC, May 22, 1884, page 4, "The Wayland Seminary."

⁹⁹ *The Lexington Gazette*, Lexington, VA, Sep. 26, 1900, "School Teachers Appointed..."

¹⁰⁰ 1907 Roanoke City Directory.

winter of 1911-1912¹⁰¹ and passed away in Roanoke on May 3, 1916.¹⁰² Rev. Downing would name a son after him.

Rev. Downing also had a half sister named Caroline Downing born about 1847. She appears on the May 30, 1852 estate inventory of James McDowell listed as age 5, valued at \$300.00. In Lexington on June 11, 1874, Caroline married VMI waiter Harvey Jamison, son of Henry and Jean Jamison of Botetourt County. On the marriage record she listed her father as “Lelburn” Downing and her mother as Parina, and her birth place as Albemarle County [Charlottesville].¹⁰³ On the 1880 Lexington census she is shown as a house servant in an academy run by Margaret Paxton. Rev. Downing, on May 22, 1909, qualified as the administrator of the estate of Caroline Downing Jamison.¹⁰⁴ Harvey Jamison died December 9, 1921 in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, at the time he was working as a butler.

Ellen Downing died in Lexington on January 15, 1884.¹⁰⁵ A letter in the archives at VMI details the passing of her husband, Lilburn: “Lexington, Tuesday, Oct. 5, 1886. Gen. F. H. Smith, Supt. V.M.I., Honored Sir: Lilburn Downing, (my father) died this morning at 5 o’clock. His remains [are] to be buried from the First Baptist Church on Wednesday at 3 o’clock P.M. I feel that because of the time of his connection with your honored institution, that this notice will be acceptable; as I know it would be his most highest pleasure to have your presence at the obsequies. Yours, S. B. Downing [Sherman B. Downing]¹⁰⁶

Rev. Downing was born only a few months before the Emancipation Proclamation and nearly three years before the end of the Civil War. He credits his early education to “Miss Sherman, Miss Bert, Miss Harper and Miss Anna Shaw, consecrated women from the North.”¹⁰⁷ Taking into account his father’s medical training, he first wanted to study medicine but later decided to become a minister. Downing also attended a blacks-only Sunday school class at Lexington Presbyterian Church, in which his parents had been taught by Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson.¹⁰⁸ The structure, built in 1835 next to Lexington Presbyterian Church, where “Stonewall” Jackson conducted his Sunday school for slaves and free blacks, was razed in 2006.¹⁰⁹

The Downing family lived in a tiny house located near the corner of Diamond Street and Carruthers Street in Lexington.¹¹⁰ The house is no longer standing.

In 1879 and 1880 Lylburn Downing was working as a waiter in Washington, DC.¹¹¹ He was living at 222 Third St., NW very near Pennsylvania Avenue and The U.S. Capitol. According to city directory records, by 1884 he was in Atlantic City, New Jersey working as a waiter. Downing last appears on Atlantic City records in 1894, he made Atlantic City his

¹⁰¹ *The New York Age*, New York, NY, May 2, 1912, “Roanoke, Virginia.”

¹⁰² Roanoke City Death Record, No. 13151.

¹⁰³ Rockbridge County marriage register, 1874.

¹⁰⁴ *The Lexington Gazette*, Lexington, VA, May 26, 1909, “In the Circuit Court.”

¹⁰⁵ *Lincoln University, College and Theological Seminary, Biographical Catalogue, 1918*, PA

¹⁰⁶ Info. From Joel T. Park; Letter to General F. H. Smith, Superintendent VMI, from Sherman B. Downing, 1886.

¹⁰⁷ *The Rockbridge County News*, Lexington, VA, Sep. 22, 1927, “Address of Rev. L. L. Downing, D. D. ...”

¹⁰⁸ Library of Virginia, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*.

¹⁰⁹ *The Washington Times*, Washington, DC, May 5, 2006, Fri.

¹¹⁰ Personal conversation with Marilyn Alexander, January 15, 2019.

¹¹¹ Washington, DC City Directory

hometown for ten years.

It was while in the Preparatory Department of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania that his great aptitude for learning was first noticed. Downing entered the Collegiate Department of Lincoln in Pennsylvania in 1885. At the time the entire cost for a year of education was \$121.50, this included: tuition, coal, furniture, library, board and washing [laundry].¹¹² In the early years of his college education he did hotel work to pay his expenses.¹¹³ For four years he stood at the head of his class with a general average so high that he was awarded a scholarship. In 1887 he won the sophomore gold medal for an original oration.

On October 10, 1888 Dr. Downing married Miss Charlotta “Lottie” Jackson Clinton¹¹⁴, of Atlantic City, daughter of Bishop Joseph Jackson Clinton (1824-1881) of the A.M.E. Zion Church. Lottie attended Oberlin College in the Preparatory Department, similar to a modern day high school, from 1881 to 1883, however, she did not graduate.¹¹⁵



To this union the following children were born: Lylburn Clinton Downing (1889-1965), a physician who helped establish Burrell Memorial, the first hospital for African Americans in Roanoke¹¹⁶; Ellwood Davis Downing (1891-1963), a Roanoke dentist who graduated from Biddle University and Howard University; Letitia Elaine Downing (1893-1972), a teacher in the public schools, following her marriage to Dr. Bert Andrew Rose she became a homemaker of high social standing in Dayton, Ohio, she returned to Roanoke following the death of her husband; Lewis King Downing (1896-1967), dean of the College of Applied Science at Howard University; Gardner Paxton Downing (1898-1978), a Roanoke dentist who studied at the University of Pennsylvania. William S. F. Downing, the youngest child, died at the age 7 in 1910, with burial at Williams Memorial Park. The second child, Ernest M. Downing was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey on September 21, 1890 and died on September 26, 1890.



Downing had the honor to be selected by the faculty of Lincoln as one of the participants of “The Junior Contest” held on June 5, 1888. The contest was judged in three categories: speaking, composition and debate. He was not awarded a prize, however, the invitation was a tribute to his academic accomplishments.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁸ In summers from 1888 to 1891, during school vacations, Downing worked as a “Sabbath-school missionary” organizing mission Sunday schools in Virginia under commission by the Presbyterian Board of

¹¹² *Annual Catalog of Lincoln University*, 1885/1886.

¹¹³ Library of Virginia, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*.

¹¹⁴ Atlantic City, NJ Marriage Records.

¹¹⁵ Personal correspondence: Feb. 4, 2019, Oberlin College archives, Louisa Hoffman, Archival Assistant.

¹¹⁶ Library of Virginia, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*.

¹¹⁷ *Annual Catalogue of Lincoln University*, 1888/1889.

¹¹⁸ *Afro-American*, Baltimore, MD, Jan. 22, 1916

Publication and Sabbath-school Work.¹¹⁹ Rev. Downing stated that in 1889 he graduated with honors, after which he entered Lincoln Theological Seminary, “determined to make ample preparations for the ministry.” However, records from Lincoln University do not



show him as an 1889 graduate and he received no special honors during the 1889 commencement.¹²⁰ There may be a reason his name was excluded. In December, 1888 a Presbyterian publication reported: “Mr. L. L. Downing, one of the first in his class at Lincoln University, is temporarily prevented from pursuing his studies by trouble with his eyes.”¹²¹ He is also not shown as a¹²² student in the Theology Department in 1890 in the Annual Catalogue but does appear in the “Middle Class” in 1892.

While still a theological student, on September 22, 1892 he was selected as an instructor in the Preparatory Department of Lincoln University at a salary of \$100.00 per annum.¹²³ He taught Latin and English in this department for two years, and was offered a permanent position on the faculty which he declined, having felt a call to the ministry.

Downing was ordained on April 3, 1894¹²⁴ by the Presbytery of Chester, Pennsylvania and graduated with a Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree from the Theological Department of Lincoln on April 17, 1894.¹²⁵ In 1906 the institution conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

In the May 1894 *Report of Presbyterian Board of Relief* Downing is listed as a Sabbath-school missionary in the Southern Virginia Presbytery of the Catawba Synod. This indicates that immediately following his graduation from the Theological Seminary, Dr. Downing came to Roanoke to assume the pastorate of this Presbyterian congregation, then a small mission of only seven members. The services were then held in a hall on Sixth Avenue, N.W. [Davis Industrial College]. When Rev. Downing took charge of the church it was on a promise of \$2.00 per week salary from the congregation. His first collection was 67 cents. There was a guarantee of a salary from the Presbyterian Freedmen’s Board; except for that, in many respects the job was uninviting. Downing began his work with determination and within a year the church had thirty-six active members.¹²⁶

On the hot Summer night of August 27, 1894 a “literary entertainment and ice cream festival” was held at Davis Hall for the benefit of the church’s building fund. The newspaper reported that the event was “largely attended and was a financial success.” The ice cream festival was scheduled to continue for several nights.¹²⁷

The spring session of the Presbytery of Southern Virginia was convened at Fifth

¹¹⁹ *Annual Catalogue of Lincoln University*, 1888/1889; *Fifty-first Annual Report of the Board of Publication and Sabbath-school Work*, May 1889.

¹²⁰ Lincoln University of Pennsylvania, Langston Hughes Memorial Library Special Collection; *Annual Catalogue of Lincoln University*, 1889/1890.

¹²¹ *The Church at Home and Abroad*, Dec. 1888, Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Publications.

¹²² From Lincoln Univ. archives, appears to show problem with right eye and possibly stitches over his right brow.

¹²³ Lincoln University of Pennsylvania, Langston Hughes Memorial Library Special Collection.

¹²⁴ *The Baltimore Sun*, Baltimore, MD, Apr. 4, 1894, Wed., page 6.

¹²⁵ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia, PA, Apr. 18, 1894, Wed., page 2.

¹²⁶ Library of Virginia, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*.

¹²⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, Aug. 28, 1894, “Entertainment at Davis Hall.”

Avenue Presbyterian on April 10, 1895. Since the brand-new church building was not yet complete, the meetings were probably held in the chapel at Davis Industrial College. This gave Fifth Avenue the opportunity to show off the plans for its new sanctuary.¹²⁸

Rev. Downing and Jesse W. Wingfield were members of a rare all-black jury to try the case of a young African American named Charlie Reynolds on April 23, 1895. Reynolds had been charged with attempted rape of a young black lady.¹²⁹ The jury returned a verdict of not guilty.¹³⁰

The very first wedding performed by Rev. Downing was perhaps the sweetest. On September 1, 1895 he joined in holy matrimony the parents of Deacon Albert Brooks: Charity Brooks and John Cooper. They had been living as husband and wife since shortly before the end of the Civil War and had fourteen children. Most of their children took the surname Cooper but Albert maintained the surname Brooks. The children of John and Charity, in addition to Albert, included many teachers and Dr. Jeremiah “Jerry” Sterling Cooper of Burrell Memorial Hospital.

Under Rev. Downing’s leadership, the plan for a church edifice at the corner of Fifth Avenue [Patton Avenue] and Third Street, NW was carried out in 1895 and 1896.¹³¹

A letter from Rev. Campbell indicated that the original \$1000 quoted price for completing the church building was a vast under-estimate. The letter dated Dec. 2, 1895 stated that \$983.70 had been “paid on building to date,” but that \$752.47 was still owed for



Architect’s design

building supplies, a painter, a plasterer, a contractor and a “tinner” [tinsmith], presumably for the roof.¹³² A letter dated July 3, 1896 to Rev. Campbell from Rev. Downing indicates that the church’s debt had been paid in full, thanks to a “liberal contribution” from First Presbyterian.¹³³

Before the new church building was even dedicated Rev. W. C. Campbell preached a sermon there on March 29, 1896, and at the same service he ordained two elders and three deacons. The newspapers reported, “Rev. L. L. Downing now has one of the prettiest churches in the city and his membership is composed of some of the best and leading colored men and women of this place.”¹³⁴

The history of First Baptist Church in Lexington states that in 1894 one of the first financial contributions toward the construction of a new church building came from Rev.

¹²⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, Apr. 12, 1895, “The Colored Presbytery.”

¹²⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, Apr. 24, 1895, “Boy Charged With a Serious Crime Tried by Colored Jury.”

¹³⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, April 26, 1895, “Hustings Court.”

¹³¹ Booklet: *25th Anniversary, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, Roanoke, Sunday, October 5, 1919*, Rev. L. L. Downing, Pastor – Virginia Room, Roanoke Public Library.

¹³² Statement from the archives of First Evangelical Presbyterian Church, from Rev. Campbell to Fifth Avenue Colored Presbyterian Church.

¹³³ Letter from the archives of First Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

¹³⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, Mar. 31, 1896.

Downing.¹³⁵ In 1867 blacks worshipping at white churches were permitted to withdraw and form Lexington African Baptist Church, the forerunner of First Baptist Church.¹³⁶

On June 1, 1896 Rev. Downing was the main speaker at the closing exercises of the Third Ward School held at High Street Baptist Church. In his speech he commended the efforts of the pupils as well as the faithful service of the teachers. The principal was T. T. Henry, and teachers were: J. Riley Dungee, Julia M. Johnson and Margaret H. Barnett.¹³⁷

A dedication service for the new Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church building was held on June 28, 1896. Preceding the dedication was a week of services. The Roanoke Times stated: "The building is a splendid structure and reflects great credit on the colored people of this city. Rev. L. L. Downing, is doing much for the upbuilding of his race in this section. Much credit is due the building committee which is composed of Elders J. W. Wingfield, T. T. Henry and J. Riley Dungee."¹³⁸



J. Riley and Flossie Belle Dungee and children

One of earliest marriages in the new church occurred on August 27, 1896 when Elder John Riley Dungee married the church organist, Miss Flossie Belle Wingfield, a teacher and daughter of church founder Jesse W. Wingfield.¹³⁹ Dungee came from a very distinguished family of free blacks. His father, Jesse Dungey, on November 7, 1871 was elected to represent King William County as a Republican in the Virginia House of

Delegates, serving one term.¹⁴⁰

J. Riley Dungee graduated from Howard University School of Law in 1887.¹⁴¹ He began practicing law at West Point, Virginia in 1890 and arrived in Roanoke a year later.¹⁴² His family lived at 220 Patton Avenue, NW. When he found that his law practice was not lucrative he settled for a career in the field of education. He was offered and accepted the position of principal in Roanoke City Colored Schools. In 1911, when he accepted the job of principal at the Abraham Lincoln School in Norfolk he relocated his family. His father-in-law and mother-in-law, Jesse and Sallie Wingfield, had been living in Norfolk since 1898.¹⁴³ The marriage of J. Riley and Flossie Belle went on to produce eight children. A descendant describes John Riley Dungee as "an attorney, educator, school administrator, poet, and community activist."¹⁴⁴ See Appendix D (page 88), for more information about Dungee.

Another early marriage performed by Rev. Downing was between fellow Lincoln University graduate Dr. Isaac David Burrell and Miss Margaret Barnett, a teacher in the

¹³⁵ Information from Marilyn Evans Alexander, quoting from the history of First Baptist Church, Lexington.

¹³⁶ <http://www.aahistoricsitesva.org/items/show/139>

¹³⁷ *The Roanoke Daily Times*, Roanoke, VA, Jun 2, 1896, "Colored School Commencement."

¹³⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, Jun. 21, 1896, Sun., page 3.

¹³⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, Aug. 28, 1896, "Elite Colored Wedding."

¹⁴⁰ https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Dungey_Jesse_ca_1820-1884

¹⁴¹ *Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University, March 1887 to March 1888*, Washington, DC.

¹⁴² Arthur Bunyan Caldwell, *History of the American Negro, Virginia Edition*, 1921, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁴³ *Norfolk, Virginia City Directory*, 1898.

¹⁴⁴ Carolyn Dungee Nickolas. *Hilda*, 2010, ArthorHouse, Bloomington, IN.

Third Ward Colored School. The elaborate wedding took place on December 28, 1897 at the residence of attorney Andrew Jackson Oliver, his wife, Susan, and Miss Barnett were sisters. J. E. Osborne, of the Pocahontas Coal Company, was best man and Miss Lucy Addison was maid of honor.¹⁴⁵ The Burrells resided at 117 Patton Ave. Another of the Barnett sisters, Alice, became the wife of Dr. James H. Roberts, a close associate of Dr. Burrell.

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Dr. and Mrs. Burrell

Downing was so well known in Roanoke it seems that every event in his life, no matter how mundane, was newsworthy. On January 1, 1898 the Richmond Planet reporter from Roanoke, W. Bolivar Davis, posted this item: "Rev. L. L. Downing is suffering with his foot again. When in college he knocked off one of his toe nails playing foot-ball, and it is feared that unpleasant results will arrive."

Fifth Avenue appears to have always been in the forefront of cultural activities in the black community. By 1899 the congregation had formed a Literary Circle. News accounts of their July 6, 1899 meeting described the program as "very elaborate" featuring a "ludicrous" recitation by W. E. Davis.¹⁴⁷

On October 17, 1900 the Catawba Synod held their annual meeting in Roanoke. Rev. Downing was the moderator.

Compassionately caring about the spiritual state of even the most lowly and lonely was a trait exhibited by Rev. Downing. In January 1902 he befriended Joe Higginbotham, a school janitor, being held in the Roanoke jail after a conviction of assault in Lynchburg. Higginbotham was sentenced to be hanged on February 24. Downing visited him frequently and is quoted as saying, "He has made a confession of his sins to his God and feels that he is saved and is willing to die."¹⁴⁸ Higginbotham was transferred to the Lynchburg jail at 2:00 am on the day of execution. At 4:00 am Downing, along with Higginbotham's pastor, Rev. Bernard Tyrell of Diamond Hill Baptist Church in Lynchburg, arrived at the jail to be at his side until the end. At 7:00 am, Downing and Tyrell sang several hymns and prayed during a tearful farewell between Higginbotham and his foster mother. At 8:18 Higginbotham was taken from his cell for his death walk to the gallows, Downing and Tyrell followed close behind. After his feet were pinned and his hands

¹⁴⁵ *The Richmond Planet*, Richmond, VA, Jan. 1, 1898, "Other Doings in the Magic City."

¹⁴⁶ Roanoke City Directory, 1906.

¹⁴⁷ *The Richmond Planet*, Richmond, VA, Jul. 15, 1899.

¹⁴⁸ *The Baltimore Sun*, Baltimore, MD, Feb. 20, 1902, page 5.

securely fastened behind him, Downing read some Bible verses. When asked if he had anything to say, Higginbotham replied: "Dear friends: The time has come for me to hang for a crime of which I am guilty. It was a terrible crime, and I am sorry for that and all my sins. Men may not forgive me, but I feel that God will. I know that I'll be saved, because Jesus died for sinners." He then tried to recite John 3:16 with some prompting by Rev. Downing. After that, the noose was placed around his neck and the black cap pulled over his head. Higginbotham uttered his final words, "Good-bye friends, meet me in heaven." The trigger was pulled and 21 minutes later he was pronounced dead by the attending physician.¹⁴⁹

Rev. Downing, in mid-1906, had installed in the ten-year-old church a stained glass window dedicated to the memory of "Stonewall" Jackson. The installation drew national attention to the church. Some feel that the omission of the word "General" from the window was intentional, downplaying Jackson's role as a Civil War officer; instead focusing on the man and his humanitarian efforts. [See page 30 for additional information.]

The Roanoke Evening News on July 19, 1909 had a half-inch headline trumpeting, "Colored Pastor for Lieutenant-Governor." Following a state convention in Newport News of "lily white Republicans," the idea of a state convention for African Americans was being presented to "leading colored citizens in every district," with the idea of nominating a "full state ticket to be voted for in the November election." The name of Dr. Downing was listed as the candidate for the office of Lieutenant-Governor, the only candidate from Roanoke. It was an ambitious plan but very much ahead of its time.

Dr. Downing was one of the speakers at a conference of black Republicans in Petersburg on February 12, 1912 to denounce the policies of the "lily white" Republicans of Virginia. A delegation was sent to Washington to protest to President Taft "against denying colored Republicans representation in Republican councils and conventions."¹⁵⁰

In 1912 Dr. Downing went to Denver as a delegate to the Negro National Educational Congress and on at least two other occasions he attended their conventions as a delegate.¹⁵¹ He also served as vice president of the Negro Organization Society for several years beginning in 1913. The 1916 meeting of the Negro Organization Society was held at Roanoke's Academy of Music. Other vice presidents that year included Maggie Lena Walker and Edgar A. Long of the Christiansburg Industrial Institute.¹⁵²

Downing was a Mason and Odd Fellow, honorably serving these organizations as Grand Master of Masons of Virginia for the 1914-1915 term¹⁵³ and District Grand Master of Odd Fellows from 1899 to 1903 and as chaplain for the Grand Staff in 1912.¹⁵⁴

Three times in succession Dr. Downing was chosen a commissioner in the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church. He served one term as moderator of the Synod of

¹⁴⁹ *Staunton Spectator and Vindicator*, Staunton, VA., Feb. 28, 1902, "Higginbotham Hanged Monday"; *The Baltimore Sun*, Baltimore, MD, Feb. 25, 1902, "Higginbotham Hangs."

¹⁵⁰ *The Daily Press*, Newport News, VA, Feb. 14, 1912, "Virginia Negroes to Appeal to Taft."

¹⁵¹ Library of Virginia, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*.

¹⁵² *Afro-American*, Baltimore, MD, Nov. 11, 1916, "Movement for Race Betterment."

¹⁵³ Library of Virginia, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Catawba (1900-1901) covering Southern Virginia and North Carolina, and two terms as moderator of the Presbytery of Southern Virginia (1914 and 1915).¹⁵⁵

On February 6, 1915 with the endorsement of the Negro Protective League of Roanoke, Downing was appointed by Judge Archer E. King "to act as probation officer in charge of all colored persons committed to his care by the juvenile court." He was the city's first black probation officer.¹⁵⁶

In April 1916 Downing was appointed by Governor Henry Carter Stuart to be one of the delegates from Virginia to the annual convention in Indianapolis of The Associated Charities and Correction Organization in the United States.¹⁵⁷

Dr. Downing began offering the only available adoption service for African American's in Roanoke in July of 1916. Within one week he found adoptive homes for a two year old child and a 5 week old baby.¹⁵⁸

Roanoke County had tollgates in 1917 to collect money to be used for road repairs.¹⁵⁹ The City of Roanoke at that time had only grown northward as far as Lynchburg Avenue (currently Orange Avenue), so to reach Old Lick Cemetery from Gainsboro Road would have required passing through a tollgate into Roanoke County. Dr. Downing wrote, "Their last resting place lies just beyond the pole across the road." On June 23, 1917 Dr. Downing, speaking for his community, wrote a letter to the editor of the Roanoke World News pleading with the supervisors of the county to allow funeral processions of black Roanokers to pass in peace "to their burying ground" without toll charges. Downing assumed the supervisors would take action once the matter was brought to their attention.¹⁶⁰

From 1917 to 1919 Dr. Downing was instrumental in establishing a sixteen-room brick community home for delinquent and transient girls¹⁶¹ called the Home School for Wayward Colored Girls,¹⁶² and later the Community Girls Home. It was located at the corner of Third and High Streets [Loudon Avenue]. Prior to opening, the newspaper reported, "According to Dr. Downing it is to be not only a place of recreation and pleasure for colored girls who roam the streets or frequent the dance halls, but a place where religious training will be carefully invoked and where colored girls who have been infractious [sic], and have been placed under the surveillance of the probation officer, may be looked after."¹⁶³

"Strange faces" were a common occurrence at Fifth Avenue. As Roanoke's

¹⁵⁵ Library of Virginia, *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*.

¹⁵⁵ *Lincoln University, College and Theological Seminary, Biographical Catalogue, 1918*, PA.

¹⁵⁶ *The Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA., Feb. 6, 1915.

¹⁵⁷ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, Apr. 26, 1916, "Rev. Downing Named Delegate by Governor."

¹⁵⁸ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, Jul. 21, 1916, "Colored Pastor Does Fine Work"; July 14, 1916, "Children For Adoption."

¹⁵⁹ *The Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA., June 21, 1917, "Roanoker Thinks Toll-gate System Unfair to Cities."

¹⁶⁰ *The Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA., June 23, 1917, "Tolls for Funerals."

¹⁶¹ *The Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA. Feb. 6, 1915.

¹⁶² *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, July 13, 1917.

¹⁶³ *The Richmond Planet*, Richmond, VA, May 3, 1919, "Community Home for Girls"; May 17, 1919, "Roanoke News."

probation officer for black youth, Downing would bring the troubled young people to church to hear the gospel and be taught the word of God.¹⁶⁴

During the midst of World War I, May 30, 1918 was proclaimed by President Woodrow Wilson as the National Day of Prayer and Fasting. In Roanoke the activities for this event were centered at the City Auditorium. Fifth Avenue was represented by Dr. Downing, and news reporters called his presentation “particularly stirring.” Citing the Lord’s Prayer as an example of prayer perfection, he explained that in times of national stress how “instead of praying ‘Thy Kingdom Come,’ man, relying on his own might and power, had always prayed in his heart, ‘My Kingdom Come,’ to the ultimate confusion of all his hopes and desires.”¹⁶⁵

On July 12, 1918 former New Jersey senator Everett Colby spoke at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian as part of his service in the United States Food Administration. Rev. Downing requested in the newspaper that “every Negro man and woman in the city attend” and asked for “the cooperation of every colored denomination.” Downing went further and made the unusual request for white employers to allow their servants to attend the 4:00 pm meeting. The senator’s message, deemed to be of “vital importance,” was an explanation of “how the colored people can help win the war by conserving in the kitchen and in every way save for our Allies and boys over there.”¹⁶⁶ It is difficult to imagine that many households in Roanoke, black or white, during those lean war years would have had so much excess that they would need to be told to conserve. At the conclusion of Colby’s program Downing offered a lengthy pledge that the “colored” people of Roanoke would remain patriotic.¹⁶⁷ Afterward, Colby held another rally at 8:30 at the Jefferson Theatre for white Roanokers.¹⁶⁸

For more than twenty years Dr. Downing was a member of the city Republican committee, being the only member of his race in that body. Even prior to World War I he was very involved with the Red Cross fund drives in the black community,¹⁶⁹ and during World War I, he was one of the speakers at a series of patriotic rallies across the state sponsored by the Negro Organization Society which supported the State Council of Defense, the War Savings Stamp program, Liberty Loan, the Red Cross, and the YMCA.¹⁷⁰ He proved himself an able representative of his people in both civic and political matters.

In 1919 the war was over and the church decided that an expansion was necessary. Upon the 25th anniversary of the pastorate of Dr. Downing the church added an annex and enlarged their building to meet the growing needs of the community. In 1919, according to the 25th anniversary booklet, the church rolls included 172 members. A complete record for

¹⁶⁴ Richard G. Williams, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson, The Black Man’s Friend*, (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 2006), page 133.

¹⁶⁵ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, May 31, 1918, “Roanoke Unites in Great Service of Humble Prayer.”

¹⁶⁶ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, Jul. 11, 1918, “Senator Colby Will Address Negroes Friday.”

¹⁶⁷ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, Jul. 13, 1918, “Colored People Pledged Loyalty.”

¹⁶⁸ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, Jul. 12, 1918, “Everett Colby Arrives in Town to Speak Tonight.”

¹⁶⁹ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, Jun. 26 1917, “The Colored Man’s Part”; Nov. 26, 1917, “Colored Churches in Red Cross Work.”

¹⁷⁰ *The Times Dispatch*, Richmond, VA, Aug. 27, 1918, “Negroes Will Aid War Program.”

the church's growth in membership, for the early years of its existence, can be found in Appendix G (page 94) at the end of this book.



BOARD OF ELDERS
From left to right: James H. Watts, R. F. Tate, Elias Mullin, Hunter H. Terry, Wm. Brown (not an officer), Charlie Lawson, Geo. W. Sheffey, William Hairston, A. F. Brooks.



BOARD OF DEACONESSES
Marie Hughes, Sadie Stockton, Mrs. Lottie J. Downing, Margaret H. Burrell, Emma Curle.

Illustrations from the 1919 Twenty-fifth anniversary booklet.

Dr. Downing felt that one of the greatest honors bestowed on him was his appointment by the Virginia War History Commission as a collaborator of history in preparing a record of accomplishments by World War I soldiers from Roanoke City and County, as well, as the counties of Botetourt, Allegheny and Botetourt.¹⁷¹



Portrait at Gainsboro Library

An essay by Shirley Beatrice Lawson gave the following information: "The beginning of the Gainsboro Branch [Library] dates back to October 9, 1920. It was Rev. A. L. James of First Baptist Church who sent a letter of inquiry to the Roanoke City Library Board inquiring about provisions to assist with the development of a library branch for African American citizens. Rev. James received an invitation to bring a committee of African American citizens to the Library Board's new meeting. The Library Board met on November 6, 1920 with the committee, which consisted of Rev. James, Dr. L. L. Downing and Principal Lucy Addison. Plans were established at this meeting for the branch library they requested. The original library, which opened in the fall of 1921, was located in the basement of the Odd Fellows building. Ella F. Bowden was the library's first librarian, serving from 1921 to 1923."¹⁷² A hand tinted large portrait of Dr. Downing by photographer George Davis maintains a place of honor in the Gainsboro Library.¹⁷³

Ralph Shepperson and Gladys Watson, brother and sister, began attending Fifth Avenue in the early 1920s and were lifelong members. They both remember Dr. Downing as a strict disciplinarian who tolerated no "foolishness" in the church. Gladys recalled, "If someone came into the auditorium during a class or service and the children turned to see

¹⁷¹ *The Richmond Planet*, Richmond, VA, May 29, 1920, "The War Record of Virginia Negroes."

¹⁷² Shirley Beatrice Lawson, *Virginia Dare Young Lee and the Gainsboro Library*, 1983. Information provided by Megan Mizak of the Gainsboro Library.

¹⁷³ The portrait is an original George Davis print.

who it was, Dr. Downing would tell the children, ‘Turn around here, I’ll let you know if a bear or wild animal is coming in to get you.’” Ralph also remembered Downing as one who demanded respect for the house of God and worship services: “He didn’t allow no gum chewing, very orderly, or an usher would come and remove you from the service.”¹⁷⁴

Delegates to the Billy Sunday Club held services at Fifth Avenue on May 29, 1921.¹⁷⁵ Billy Sunday was an American evangelist famous for his “fire and brimstone” sermons and his firm stance on prohibition (anti-alcohol). He attracted a large following from the turn of the twentieth century and well into the 1920s. His evangelism brought him a great deal of fame and wealth.

On June 8, 1921 Fifth Avenue sponsored a “Colored Baby Conference.” The speaker was Dr. W. Brownley Foster who talked about “summer diseases common to babies and young children.” In his talk, Dr. Foster laid great stress on “the importance of screening the house against the pestilent fly.”¹⁷⁶

A Young Men’s Christian Club was organized at Fifth Avenue on February 13, 1922. The officers included W. E. Davis as the President, L. A. Holder as the Secretary, Dr. E. D. Downing as Treasurer and Rev. M. W. Clair as Chaplain. As reported, “The object of the organizers of the club is to later organize a Young Men’s Christian Association, for which, it is thought that the club would make a good nucleus.”¹⁷⁷



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1925 Synod of Catawba meeting in Charlotte, Dr. Downing seated on the left.

The *New York Age* newspaper covered the Minister’s Conference of Hampton Institute in their July 8, 1922 issue. The annual conference “was organized to afford an opportunity to ministers of all denominations to meet for a few days of study and

¹⁷⁴ Richard G. Williams, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson, The Black Man’s Friend*, (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 2006), page 133.

¹⁷⁵ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, May 28, 1921.

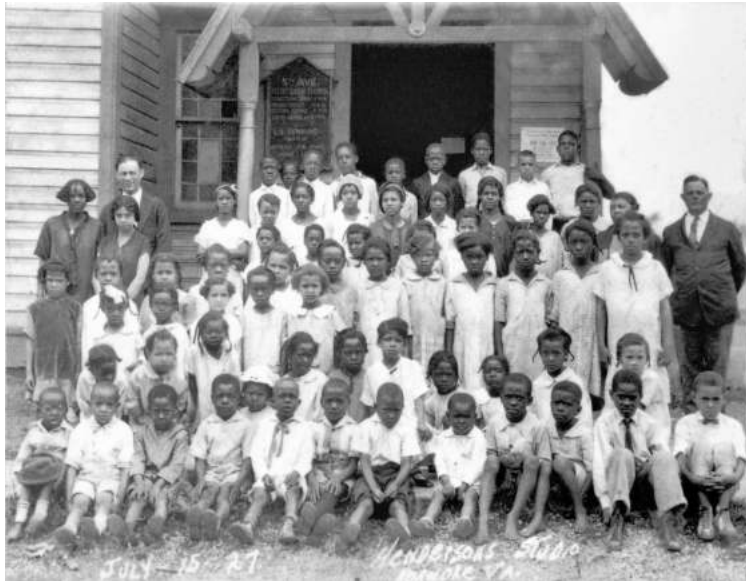
¹⁷⁶ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, Jun 9, 1921.

¹⁷⁷ *Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, Feb. 15, 1922.

¹⁷⁸ Photo used by permission of the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

discussion of the great common problems which they face in their work." Ten Presbyterian ministers attended and Dr. Downing was elected one of the Vice Presidents.

On November 12, 1925 Downing attended the state conference of the Negro Organization Society in Staunton. At Mount Zion Baptist Church he presided at a discussion on "better health." [See page 37 for information about this organization.]



Vacation Bible School – July 15, 1927 – Dr. Downing on the right, Dr. L. C. Downing on the left – Photo by Henderson's Studio

A highly amusing form of entertainment from earlier times was the "womanless wedding." On Friday night March 21, 1930 the church was crowded with those who were anxious to see Dr. Gardner Downing become the "bride" of W. F. Hughes, a local undertaker. With Dr. Ellwood Downing acting as best man and Richard Jones as preacher, the wedding featured a complete cast of eight bride's maids, a maid of honor, six groomsmen, two flower girls and a ring bearer, all male.¹⁷⁹

The meeting of the Catawba Synod was held at Fifth Avenue, October 8-9, 1930.

THE STONEWALL JACKSON WINDOW

Dr. Downing is best remembered for the church's Tiffany-style stained glass window. Downing designed the window with a pen sketch [see original sketch to the left] and art glass workers in Chicago, probably the Temple Art Glass Company, were responsible for its creation. As early as the first of June 1905 Downing announced his intention to have the window created and installed.



¹⁸⁰ Downing, wisely quoted others to explain the reason he wished to honor Jackson: "Prior to the war Professor Jackson, while in the Virginia Military Institute at Lexington, Va., was the superintendent of

¹⁷⁹ *The Afro-American*, Baltimore, MD, Mar. 22, 1930 and Mar. 29, 1930.

¹⁸⁰ Downing's original pen sketch, from the installation program of Rev. H. L. McCrorey Jr.

a Sunday school for the children of colored people in Lexington. He was devoted to his work. When the Great War came on he never lost his interest in these, his wards.

Dr. Wm. S. White, his pastor, states of him and his Sabbath school: 'The Sabbath school founded by General Jackson for the benefit of the blacks was a decided success. This distinguished man threw himself into this work with all his characteristic energy and wisdom. Whatsoever he did prospered. To the moment, he was always punctual at the opening of the school. Though wholly ignorant of the science of music, and having neither ear nor voice for singing, he yet learned to sing 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me' so that the school would recognize it and carry it along. Sabbath after Sabbath he would stand before his school of blacks and raise this hymn and tune for them. He issued monthly reports to the owners of the slaves. These reports he delivered in person, calling at each house where one of his pupils lived. Under his management this school became one of the most interesting and useful institutions in the Lexington Presbyterian Church.'"¹⁸¹

Mary Anna Jackson, the second wife of "Stonewall," taught with him. She related that "he preferred that my labors should be given to the colored children, believing that it was more important and useful to put the strong hand of the Gospel under the ignorant African race, to lift them up."¹⁸²



Stonewall Jackson

"Mrs. Margaret Junkin Preston, sister of Jackson's first wife, says of him: 'When the Major had become a General and was sweeping back and forth through his native Virginia at the head of his army, he rarely wrote a letter home in which something was not said about his well-beloved Sunday school. Success or defeat, anxiety or suffering, glory or grief, nothing made him forget it, or cease to be interested in its welfare.'

The incident is related of him by his pastor, when, after the Battle of Manassas [Battle of Bull Run], where Jackson won immortal fame, they awaited so anxiously to hear from him and when the letter was opened instead of an account of the battle, it was an apology for not having sent his contribution to his colored Sunday school, and was accompanied with a check for his offering."¹⁸³ His unassuming note read: "In my tent last night, after a fatiguing day's service, I remembered that I had failed to send you my contribution for our colored Sunday school. Enclosed you will find my check." See Appendix F (page 92) at the back of this book for a more thorough history of the Sunday school for slaves and free blacks.

On July 20, 1905 Rev. Downing held a preliminary meeting to announce that he had arranged for the erection of a memorial window to Stonewall Jackson in the church. The church was crowded, a number of the most prominent ex-Confederates of the city were present and Rev. W. C. Campbell, pastor of First Presbyterian Church occupied the pulpit with Downing. Downing said that from his boyhood "it has been his ambition to erect a memorial to the great man who had done so much for him and the colored race." The proposed window was described as "representing a tent shaded by trees with a stream of

¹⁸¹ *The Roanoke Evening News*, Roanoke, VA, June 2, 1905, "A Unique Memorial."

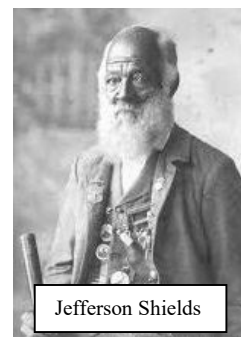
¹⁸² Mary Anna Jackson, *Memoirs of Stonewall Jackson by His Widow*, 1895, Louisville, KY, The Prentice Press.

¹⁸³ *The Roanoke Evening News*, Roanoke, VA, June 2, 1905, "A Unique Memorial."

water running by it with the bare and rugged rock like a stone wall.”¹⁸⁴

The unveiling of the Jackson window was national news, covered by every prominent newspaper in the country. Most of the reports of the July 29, 1906 event followed a similar format: “A memorial window to Gen. Thomas (‘Stonewall’) Jackson was dedicated at the Negro Presbyterian church at Roanoke Sunday. Aside from its own significance, the occasion was made notable by the attendance, in a body, of the Confederate camps of Roanoke and Salem and the chapters of the Daughters of the Confederacy of the two places. The chief addresses were by leading white citizens of Roanoke. The window represents an army camping at the banks of a river, and underneath the picture are inscribed Jackson's last words: ‘Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees.’ The mother and father of the pastor, Rev. L. L. Downing, as slaves, were Sunday-school pupils of ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, in Lexington, before the war, and it has been the ambition of the pastor since his boyhood to honor the great commander. Money for the purchase of the window came solely from the Negroes.”

“The chief address on that occasion was made by ‘Uncle’ Jeff Shields.”¹⁸⁵ *The Roanoke Evening News* in its July 30, 1906 edition reported at length about Shields: “With footsteps faltering beneath the weight of four score years and two, but wearing proudly upon his breast marks of distinction from many a Confederate convention and appareled in a suit of Confederate gray, old ‘Jeff’ Shields, Stonewall Jackson’s body servant during the war and his Sunday school pupil prior to it, alighted from the Shenandoah Valley train Saturday, having come to Roanoke to attend the unveiling of the Jackson memorial



window in the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church yesterday afternoon at 4 o’clock. It may be the last tribute of devotion he will publicly pay to the memory of his distinguished master, and so he traveled over from his home at Lexington Saturday to take part in the exercises. The parents of the pastor of the church, Rev. L. L. Downing, were mates of Shields in the Sunday school class for the Negro slaves Jackson taught before the war, and so he was naturally looked [upon] as a distinguished visitor.

Old ‘Jeff’ Shields belonged to Col. J. K. Edmondson [James Kerr Edmondson], of Lexington, who loaned him to Jackson for his body servant or, more properly, cook, when Jackson went off to war; he was with him in the valley campaigns, and was with him at the last on the fatal field of Chancellorsville. He loves to indulge in reminiscences of those days and talks to anyone who cares to hear them. Lexington, as most everybody knows, is the burial place of both Jackson and Lee and it is therefore a Mecca for Southern tourists. In this way old “Jeff” meets hundreds of new Southerners every year, and as but few leave him without being a quarter or fifty cents the poorer, he manages to live in comfort in his cottage on the outskirts of town.”

Shields’s claims that he was “General Jackson’s first scholar” and that he was “indebted to General Jackson for his early religious training” are believable because of his

¹⁸⁴ *The Lexington Gazette*, Lexington, VA, July 26, 1905, “Unique Memorial to Stonewall Jackson.”

¹⁸⁵ *The Roanoke World News*, Roanoke, VA, May 31, 1920.

lifelong connection to Lexington and his close association with other member's of Jackson's Sunday school class for slaves. Following the war, Shields became something of a "pet" among former Confederate soldiers and Shield's wisely used his notoriety to secure a nice living from their contributions, actually gaining the upper hand in this relationship.¹⁸⁶



The Lexington Gazette reported that "interest was added to the unveiling [of the window] by the touching of the electric button by Jefferson Shields of Lexington."¹⁸⁷ It is not known what service the "electric button" actually performed. Jefferson Shields died in his sleep 1918 at the ripe old age of eighty-nine.¹⁸⁸

Another featured speaker was Joseph H. Harman who was with Jackson in the Battle of Manassas. Harman told the story of how Jackson got the name of "Stonewall."¹⁸⁹

¹⁹⁰ In Dr. Downing's speech to the packed church that day, he counseled his fellow African Americans "to be as chivalrous and honest as you were in the days of slavery and to uplift yourselves. Those who want to get ahead will find the white man his best friend. There is no reason why the races cannot work in harmony."¹⁹¹

At the conclusion of the ceremony "the pastor and congregation presented the William Watts Camp of Confederate Veterans with a large picture of the window."¹⁹²

Since the word "General" does not appear on the window, some feel that this was an intentional omission to downplay Jackson's role in the Civil War and concentrate on his compassionate acts to his black Sunday school members.

The large stained glass window dedicated to Jackson was flanked on either side by two smaller stained glass windows. One of the windows was dedicated to Col. John Thomas Lewis Preston who was one of the founders of Virginia Military Institute and the Sunday School Superintendent at Lexington Presbyterian Church where the Downings attended. He and his wife, Margaret Junkin Preston, were so impressed with Lylburn's intellectual abilities they helped to finance his education. Margaret Junkin Preston is frequently referred to as "Poetess of the Confederacy," she was the sister of "Stonewall" Jackson's first wife, Elinor Junkin, and daughter of Union loyalist Dr. George Junkin, President of Washington College (later Washington and Lee).

The other window is dedicated to Rev. Doctor and Mrs. James I. Brownson of Washington, Pennsylvania. While working in Atlantic City, Downing was befriended by the Brownsons. Rev. Brownson served as pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Washington, Pennsylvania for over 50 years. The Brownsons also pledged monetary

¹⁸⁶ Richard G. Williams Jr., *Lexington, Virginia and the Civil War*, (The History Press-2013)

¹⁸⁷ *The Lexington Gazette*, Lexington, VA, Aug. 1, 1906.

¹⁸⁸ Richard G. Williams Jr., *Lexington, Virginia and the Civil War*, (The History Press-2013)

¹⁸⁹ *The Lexington Gazette*, Lexington, VA, Aug. 1, 1906.

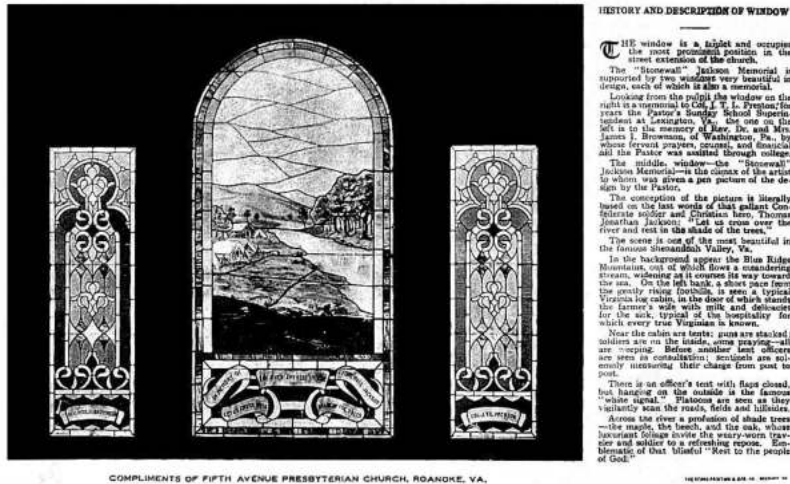
¹⁹⁰ *The Southern Workman*, October, 1917, by L. L. Downing, "A 'Stonewall' Jackson Memorial," pgs. 343-345.

¹⁹¹ Raymond P. Barnes, *History of the City of Roanoke*, Commonwealth Press, Radford, VA.

¹⁹² *The Lexington Gazette*, Lexington, VA, Aug. 1, 1906.

support for Downing's education. With the help of his friends, when Downing returned to college he no longer had to work as a hotel waiter to make ends meet.¹⁹³

Rev. Downing contributed an article entitled "A 'Stonewall' Jackson Memorial, A Personal Narrative" to the October 1917 issue of the African-American monthly magazine *The Southern Workman*. The article details the reasons for his passionate hero-worship of Jackson. The last sentence in the article is very interesting: "My life's desire is to make this modest little frame church a stone building, to be known as the Stonewall Jackson Memorial." His article is so packed with information a copy is included in Appendix E (page 89) at the end of this book.



Church flyer giving information about the "Stonewall Jackson" window.¹⁹⁴

A lengthy article by Mrs. J. P. Caldwell featuring the church window was in the June 3, 1920 edition of *The Charlotte Observer*. The column entitled "One Minute Interviews" was syndicated to other newspapers around the country.

When the church building burned in 1959 the Stonewall Jackson window was removed and reinstalled in the new church building, completed in 1961. [See page 64.]

On October 19, 1989 Fifth Avenue Presbyterian entered into an agreement giving permission to The Sons of Confederate Veterans to commission a piece of art to be created by Robert Eddy of Vinton depicting the "Stonewall" Jackson window. In addition to the window, the artwork would depict portraits of "Stonewall" Jackson, Dr. Downing, the original Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church and Jackson teaching a Sunday school class.

The artwork was unveiled at a 10:00 a.m. ceremony on February 24, 1990 at the Roanoke Public Library.¹⁹⁵ The gift was accepted on behalf of the city by Mayor Noel Taylor.¹⁹⁶ The artwork was intended to be displayed in the Virginia Room of the Roanoke library, it is currently in library storage. A copy of the artwork can be found in the church. This artwork was featured in the newspaper's Looking Back column on February 15, 2015.

¹⁹³ Gary C. Walker, *Civil War Tales*, (Roanoke VA, 1992) VA. Pgs. 119-133.

¹⁹⁴ Original in the archives of Virginia Military Institute.

¹⁹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, Feb. 21, 1990, Ed Shamy, "Stonewall Tribute Joins Two Races."

¹⁹⁶ Gary C. Walker, *Civil War Tales*, (Roanoke VA, 1992) VA. Pgs. 119-133.

The Roanoke Times in its January 18, 1993 edition ran a story by Robert Freis entitled “Window On The Past.” The central focus of the article was the “Stonewall” Jackson window, and it contained many quotes by the pastor at that time, Rev. Dr. Vernie Bolden Sr., particularly on the subject of celebrating the ten-year-old holiday known as Lee-Jackson-King Day. Bolden said, “The practice of celebrating Lee, Jackson and King on the same day is an issue in the black community. One wonders if that tends to dilute the recognition of all three.” [In the year 2000, Gov. Jim Gilmore split the holidays, noting the incongruity of celebrating two Confederate generals and a civil rights icon simultaneously.]

The Christian Broadcasting Network has an installment about the window on their website entitled “Civil War: Faith in Black and White” which was reported by Lee Webb. This program features footage from inside the church and a short interview with church Elder Freeland Pendleton. With the window in the background, the author Richard G. Williams Jr. was interviewed about his book Stonewall Jackson: The Black Man’s Friend.¹⁹⁷

The window has made news several times in recent years. On October 30, 2011 the *Roanoke Times* published an article entitled “Church Window Illuminates Complexity of Past” by Tonia Moxley. This article followed the publication earlier that month of the book The Untold Civil War: Exploring the Human Side of War by James I. Robertson which, on page 336, featured the story of the window. “There’s nothing else like it,” the retired Virginia Tech professor said of the relic and its story. “I fought like the devil to keep it in [the book], and the congregation will be so happy.”

On September 10, 2017 the CBS Television show Sunday Morning broadcast a program entitled “Is It Time to Tear Down Monuments to the Confederacy?” which was reported by correspondent Mo Rocca.¹⁹⁸ Portions of the episode were filmed inside the church and Pastor Vernie Bolden Jr., Elder and third generation church-member Joyce Bolden and Elder Ray Williams were interviewed. Pastor Bolden captured the gist of the program with his comment that “it’s complicated.”

Florida’s *Orlando Sentinel* published an article entitled “Don’t Destroy History to Make a Political Statement” on March 16, 2018 by Reed Lannom. The story of the church window was featured as well as Joyce Bolden’s comments during the CBS interview.

A devotional from St. Stephen’s Presbyterian Church in Fort Worth, Texas is about the writer’s visit to the church and his interesting views on the window. He wrote: “Over the years, the congregation has often been asked why they have a window that honors such a questionable hero, or challenged to take the window down, but they refuse. For better or for worse, it’s part of their history, and they’re proud of it. It’s a kind of representation of the redemptive power of God—that a passionate secessionist and slave owner and a vicious soldier like Jackson could also be so dedicated to this Sunday school for slave children; that the child of one of those former slaves could rise up to become a Presbyterian minister and pastor a church. It’s a way of saying that God can use the most unlikely circumstances and the least likely people to do God’s work in the world; and that faith can

¹⁹⁷ <http://www1.cbn.com/content/civil-war-faith-black-and-white>

¹⁹⁸ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/stonewall-jackson-church-window-memorialized-confederate-monuments-roanoke/>

build relationships and opportunities between the most unlikely of people; and that over all of human history, there is this amazing, loving God who is sovereign over everything, who can turn bad to good, and can redeem and save the most unlikely people.”¹⁹⁹

Rev. Dr. Vernie Bolden Sr., Fifth Avenue Presbyterian pastor in the early 1990s, gave this interesting perspective on the window: “It represents an ideal of what could be and what should be, instead of the reality of what is.”²⁰⁰

THE LYLURN DOWNING SCHOOL

In 1927 Downing preached the dedication sermon for the Lylburn Downing School established for the education of black children in Lexington and eventually Rockbridge County. The school opened its door for the first day of classes on September 12, 1927.²⁰¹

Some of Downing’s remarks in his usual florid style included the following: “In this beautiful town of immortal history, we have assembled to dedicate this building, not alone to the devotion and service of the youth and splendid people of Lexington, but also that it may become a beacon and blessing to the whole family of mankind.”

“I am proud to have the honorable task of consecrating this memorable edifice, because of its objective. I estimate the school to be far more valuable than all the arsenals, forts and navies in all the world. Only the ages to come shall touch the revelation [of] the masterly service and full capableness of a developed active intelligent human being. How timely this contribution and what inspiration it imparts.”

“If, by some trick of magic, I could grip your minds, and with them, soar out and up and on and away, through the immeasurable star-depths, beholding millions upon millions of whirling burning worlds as they roll on and on in their blazing orbits, all working together with God in perfect harmony. From some prince of ring-girdled planets we might have the vision of our life, [then] returning to Earth and applying the lesson, do you not think that we could work together?”²⁰²



Randolph School

The new school replaced the dilapidated Randolph Street Colored School. It had been a long time coming. For years the congregations of Randolph Street Methodist and First Baptist Church had petitioned the ²⁰³ Lexington School Board and City Council to build a new school for African American students. They pointed out that African Americans paid taxes, yet their education curriculum and facility was sadly lacking.

In 1925 the town used the revenue it had received from increased taxes on real and personal property to purchase a lot on the corner of Maury and Diamond Streets to begin construction on the school. The school initially included nine grades and it was not until the 1940s that the school encompassed all twelve grades.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ St. Stephens Presbyterian Church, Nov. 11, 2012, “Let Us Go To The Other Side.”

²⁰⁰ Richard G. Williams, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson, The Black Man’s Friend*, (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 2006), page 135.

²⁰¹ Application for National Register of Historic Places, US Department of Interior, National Park Service.

²⁰² *Rockbridge County News*, Lexington, VA, Sep. 22, 1927.

²⁰³ Photo used courtesy of the Rockbridge Historical Society.

²⁰⁴ *Rockbridge Epilogues*, Education First, by Suzanne Barksdale Rice, Oct. 23, 2017.

Though the Lylburn Downing School closed in 1965 when local schools were integrated, Lexington's current Middle School bears his name, and the original school structure, which stands next door at 300 Diamond Avenue, has housed a community and child care center for the Diamond Hill neighborhood since the 1980s. Downing's portrait still hangs in a place of honor over the doors to the original cloakroom which now houses an exhibit dedicated to the school's history.

Even in Lexington there is still some question as to why the school was named after Dr. Downing. He gave no endowment to the school and other than being born there and his "Stonewall" Jackson memorial, his personal connection to Lexington was dubious. A conversation with the director of the Rockbridge County Historical Society and with a former student revealed no answers to this question.²⁰⁵ There were education pioneers, who fought for years to have a suitable school for black children in Lexington, which were certainly deserving of this honor. There was also a black Olympic athlete, Howard P. Drew, born in Lexington that could have been honored. No Downing relatives had lived there since 1909, so his ties to Lexington had been severed long before the school was built.

Like Booker T. Washington, Downing was an accommodationist who preached acceptance of racial domination and discrimination, with the hope that there would be personal and community elevation through hard work, education and material prosperity. Both taught a philosophy of self-help, self-control, racial solidarity, and racial harmony. Although Downing joined others locally to gently negotiate for better public facilities, he was not a civil rights leader; he never pushed for equality or challenged segregation, therefore, he was not being honored as a champion of human rights.

On a statewide level, Downing's interest in education was well known through his active participation in the Negro Organization Society. The Negro Organization Society was a grassroots advocacy association that stressed community self-improvement for black Virginians during the "Jim Crow" era. Founded in 1912 at the Hampton Institute, its motto was "Better Schools, Better Health, Better Homes, Better Farms." Pursuit of these four goals was considered essential to the protection and welfare of black citizens. The Society promoted building schools and improving education by accrediting more institutions, and stressing the need for better-prepared, better-paid teachers. Their first priority was to challenge and defeat the opposition in both white and black communities to educating black children. The Society conducted "awareness campaigns" in large public spaces in order to promote reading, writing and arithmetic training for young African Americans.²⁰⁶

Clearly, Downing's work to promote the advancement of education in Virginia was ample reason for naming a school after him. Or, it has been suggested that perhaps the answer to the question is quite simply that the school's name was a compromise. Randolph Street Methodist and First Baptist Church jointly made great efforts to get the school established; it could be that they felt naming the school after a Methodist or Baptist would slight the other, so they settled the issue by naming the school after a Presbyterian.

²⁰⁵ Personal interviews January 15, 2019.

²⁰⁶ https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/negro_organization_society#start_entry by Phyllis McClure.



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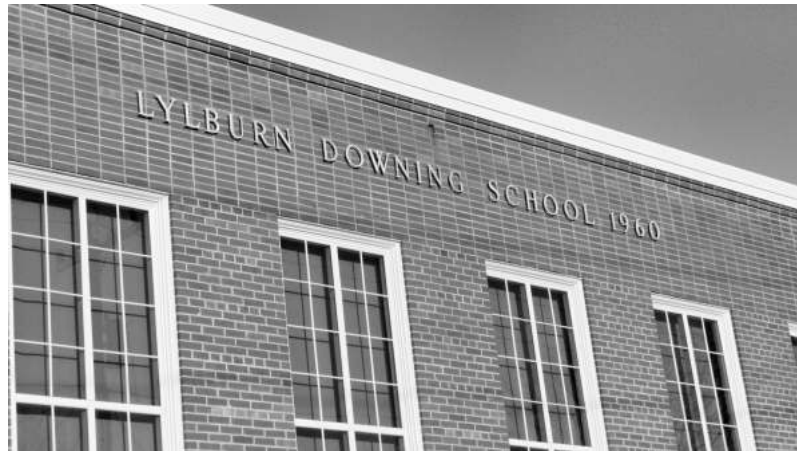
The first graduation exercises for the school occurred on June 1, 1928. The graduating class consisted of nine students. The eight girl graduates wore dresses made in the sewing class and the one boy in the class wore a shirt that he made himself.²⁰⁹ Obviously Domestic Science was an important part of the curriculum.

The newer Lylburn Downing Middle School also recognizes Rev. Downing with his portrait at the entrance to the school.

²⁰⁷ Top photos used courtesy of the Rockbridge Historical Society, (left) School construction, 1926.

²⁰⁸ Photos by Michael E. Blankenship.

²⁰⁹ *The News Leader*, Staunton, VA, June 4, 1928, Mon., page 10



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THE DEATH OF REV. DR. DOWNING

Following an illness of four days duration²¹¹, at the age of 74, Dr. Downing “crossed over the river” at his home, 236 Patton Avenue, on February 15, 1937 at 9:00 in the evening. A cerebral hemorrhage was the cause of death. The newspaper eulogized him as “Thoroughly honorable in every relation of life, he was a consistent advocate of the high principles he practiced, as well as preached, throughout the more than two score years he lived among us, beloved by many, respected by all. Wholly loyal to his own race, he did much to improve race relations in Roanoke and the ranks of our civic leaders have lost one whose judgment was respected and whose counsel was valued. A fine man in every respect was Dr. Downing. Intelligent, kindly and thoroughly imbued with the spirit of service, he made for himself a place in the community that will hard to fill. Roanoke has lost a splendid citizen and the Negroes of Roanoke have lost a leader whose life was spent in the service to their lasting good. We speak from the heart in acclaiming this departed Negro pastor God’s good man. Truly he was that.”²¹²

“In the list of men and women who have left permanent impress on the character of the City of Roanoke place must be found for Rev. Lylburn Liggins Downing. For Dr.

²¹⁰ Photos by Michael E. Blankenship.

²¹¹ *The Roanoke Times*, Roanoke, VA, Feb. 16, 1937, “Widely Known Negro Minister Ill but Few Days.”

²¹² *Ibid.*

Downing not only represented what was best of the Negro race but served as mediator, interpreter and translator of the aims and purposes of that race to white citizens of Roanoke. As a clergyman, his service to the community extended far beyond the bounds of his congregation, winning respect of the community. Loyal to his own race and devoted to its improvement, his wise counsel was invited in many city-wide movements. A believer in progress through education, he set an example in the higher education of his own children. The colored population of Roanoke has lost a leader whose spirituality and counsel it could safely depend."²¹³

The crowd that filled Fifth Avenue Presbyterian was described as "mammoth" long before the hour for the funeral. Rev. Arthur L. James of First Baptist (Gainsboro) was in charge of the service. The eulogy was pronounced by Dr. Yorke Jones, dean of Johnson C. Smith University, a lifelong friend of Dr. Downing. Dr. E. Ethelred Ricks, former pastor of First Baptist Church (Gainsboro), read the obituary, and Rev. Dr. H. L. McCrorey Sr., president of Johnson C. Smith University, offered the closing prayer.

During the funeral service solos were sung by Rev. Mr. Watkins, state clerk of the Presbytery of Virginia; the Rev. H. W. McNeer, president of the Ingleside-Fee Memorial Institute, Burkeville; Prof. Arnett G. Macklin, principal of the Lucy Addison High School; and the Rev. R. L. Briscoe of St. John's AME Zion Church. Pallbearers included Downing's four sons; son-in-law Dr. Bert A. Rose; long-time neighbor John Walker Scott Jr.; as well as friend, Yousouf Hutsona. The Masonic rites were conducted at Williams Memorial Park (at that time known as Lincoln Burial Park).²¹³



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Overflow crowd at Dr. Downing's funeral.

In 1927 Dr. Downing stated that Lottie has been an invalid since 1923.²¹⁵ Following a severe illness of three months, Lottie Downing passed away September 13, 1938 of a cerebral hemorrhage at her home. Her funeral service was conducted by Rev. Arthur L. James, pastor of First Baptist Church (Gainsboro). The eulogy was offered by Rev. Dr. George Preston Watkins of Grace Presbyterian Church in Martinsville. Music for the service was rendered by the church choir, with a solo by Mrs. George E. Moore. The elders of the church served as honorary pallbearers while active pallbearers were her four sons; son-in-law Dr. Bert A. Rose; John Walker Scott Jr. and church elder, Dr. J. B. Claytor.²¹⁶

²¹³ *The Roanoke World-News*, Roanoke, VA, Feb. 17, 1937, "Dr. Downing's Death."

²¹⁴ *Journal and Guide*, Norfolk, VA, Feb. 27, 1937, "Mourners Overflow Church at Downing Rites." Photo – Davis; "Many Pay Tribute to Noted Roanoke Presbyterian Minister."

²¹⁵ Correspondence between Rev. Downing and Col. Joseph R. Anderson, VMI Historiographer, October 18, 1927.

²¹⁶ *Journal and Guide*, Norfolk, VA, Sep. 24, 1938, "Death Claims Mrs. Lottie J. Downing in Roanoke."

MISS LUCY ADDISON



MISS LUCY ADDISON

²¹⁷ The 1919 booklet for the church's twenty-fifth anniversary contained the following biography of one the most well-known early members of Fifth Avenue: "Miss Lucy Addison, [has been] for thirty-three years a teacher in the public schools of Roanoke and for almost as long identified with the upbuilding of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, and [is] at present Superintendent of the Sunday School. Previous to this she had worked in the Sunday Schools of both St. Paul's A.M.E. Church and the High Street Baptist Church. It is certain, the services of the pastor excepted, that no other individual member of the congregation has been instrumental in accomplishing so much for the upbuilding of her church, and it is extremely doubtful, if any other woman in Roanoke has done as much for the moral, educational and spiritual uplift of her race than has Miss Lucy Addison, the subject of this sketch. She was born in Fauquier County, Virginia, and attended the schools of Virginia and Washington, D.C., in her girlhood. At an early age she became identified with the education of the youth of her race, and by taking post graduate Summer Normal courses has kept fully abreast of the times. She is now entering on her thirty-third session as teacher in the public schools of Roanoke. For the past three years she has been principal of the Harrison Avenue School, and as such occupies a front position in educational circles in Virginia.

Miss Addison has always been a firm believer in Roanoke. She was here in the early boom period, and through the dark days following, with a stout heart and never faltering, she stood by her post, never tiring in the performance of arduous self-assigned tasks, having for their object the best interest of her race and of the public.

When the influenza epidemic struck Roanoke last winter [1918] and volunteer nurses were needed by the scores, Miss Addison was one of the first to respond to the call of the Local Chapter of the American Red Cross, organizing her teachers and others into a most effective nursing corps, going cheerfully wherever directed, ministering to the stricken families of the city and saving precious human lives. Miss Addison with her multiplicity of duties has found time to engage in other work of a public nature, and among other things is a trustee for the Home School for Colored Girls at Peaks, Virginia [Hanover County]."²¹⁸

Miss Lucy Addison was born enslaved on December 8, 1859 at Scott Township in Fauquier County, Virginia. Her parents were Charles and Elizabeth Anderson Addison. She was one of six siblings, including: Charles J., Hattie, Ida, John and Blanche.²¹⁹ After graduating from the Quaker-run Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia in 1882 with a degree in teaching, Addison began her life-long career as an educator. In 1886 she relocated to Roanoke, Virginia to take a teaching position at the Gregory [Third Ward] and

²¹⁷ Illustration from the 25th anniversary booklet.

²¹⁸ Booklet: *25th Anniversary, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, Roanoke, Sunday, October 5, 1919*, Rev. L. L. Downing, Pastor – Virginia Room, Roanoke Public Library.

²¹⁹ Ancestry.com

Gainsboro Schools. She was promoted to Assistant Principal in 1888 and accepted a position as Principal for Harrison School in 1917. After expanding the curriculum to include high school classes at Harrison, Addison repeatedly lobbied the Virginia Board of Education for full accreditation. Addison's efforts were finally recognized in 1924 when the Virginia Board of Education accredited Harrison School as a secondary school. In 1927 Addison retired from Roanoke City Public Schools. Roanoke opened the Lucy Addison High School the year after Addison retired and she traveled to Roanoke to attend the formal opening ceremony on April 19, 1929. Lucy Addison High School served as Roanoke's only African American high school until desegregation, finally closing as a high school in 1973. The school has gone through many transitions and is currently the Lucy Addison Aerospace Magnet Middle School. During her life, Addison served on several advisory boards including the Board of Trustees for the Burrell Memorial Hospital and the Advisory Board for the Gainsboro Library.

In retirement Miss Addison lived with her sister in Washington, DC. She died November 13, 1937 in Washington, DC at the age of 75 from chronic nephritis. She is buried in National Harmony Memorial Park Cemetery in Hyattsville, Maryland.²²⁰

PHOTO FROM THE PAST



Children's Day, mid-1930s, a frail appearing Rev. Downing stands at the left rear in the dark suit. Dr. E. D. Downing is in the white suit. Photo by George Davis.

²²⁰ Find-A-Grave, memorial 12188203.

²²¹ Photo by George Davis.

Rev. L. L. Downing, D. D.
PASTOR FIFTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
RESIDENCE, 236 PATTON AVENUE, NORTHWEST
ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

Downing letterhead

THE CHARMING ORIGINAL CHURCH



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²²² A Downing family photo used by permission of Joel T. Park.

²²³ Photo used courtesy of The Virginia Room, Roanoke Public Library, photo by George Davis, after 1906.

A DOWNING FAMILY ALBUM²²⁴



Back: Lylburn Clinton, Dr. Downing, Eloise (LC's oldest), Ellwood, Lewis King
Front: Gardner Paxton, Lottie and Letitia Elaine (ca.1923)



Lottie and Dr. Downing



Lottie and Dr. Downing



Back: Helene Downing (LC's wife), Dr. Downing, Letitia Elaine; Front: Lottie (ca. 1923)



Dr. Downing (seated) with sons: Gardner, Lylburn C., Ellwood

²²⁴ All Downing family photos used courtesy of Joel T. Park.