The Cultures of Teaching: Community Commitments & Local Black Educators

Eric Wilson, Executive Director, Rockbridge Historical Society
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 also contact us to access sites, or download full articles. Please contact us with your questions, or suggestions for additional 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.

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*Eric Wilson, Local Black Histories Virtual Access, Lasting Archive

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*Mark McClellan, The Road to Black Men’s Forge: A Story of Race, Sex, and Slaves on the Colonial American Frontier (*Video Lecture)
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Aspects of Black Religious and Educational Development in Lexington, Virginia, 1840-1928

Theodore C. DeLaney, Jr.

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

RHS Local Black Histories
RockbridgeHistory.org
Lylburn Downing School opened here in 1927 after the Home and School League, an organization of local Black parents and citizens, campaigned for equitable schools. Built with financial support from the Black community, Rockbridge County, and the Rosenwald Fund, the countywide school first served grades 1-9 and expanded to include a high school in the 1940s. Desegregation closed the original edifice in 1965, but the newer buildings became Lexington’s middle school. Lylburn Downing (1862-1937) was born enslaved in Lexington, attended Lincoln University, and was pastor of Roanoke’s Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church for more than 40 years. He was a longtime advocate for African American education.

Department of Historic Resources, 2021
Educators &
Local Students
Lexington’s Two Black Schools
Major Shifts in People and Place
Local Desegregation (1965) → HS Consolidation (1992)

Who Studies? What Communities do Students Come From?
More & More Diverse Course Offerings… Class Sizes?
Blending ‘School Cultures’?
Thinking Back to Your School Histories
(whether as Students, Teachers, or Parents)

How did YOU get to SCHOOL??

Practical Transportation?
Generational Uplift?

Personal Memories ~ Social & Systemic Patterns
Trial Integration Here: Fall 1964
10 years after Brown v. Board

Approved by Virginia Pupil Placement Board:

3 pupils to integrate Ann Smith ‘Kindergarten’ School

1 transfer from Downing Elementary to Central Elem.

2 transfers from Downing High to Lexington High
Debating School Consolidation in Rockbridge, 1970s-80s

Rockbridge County Residents Approve $13 Million in Bonds to Fund High School Consolidation: March 29, 1989 ~ With 40% Voter Turnout, Passes by only 30 votes: 1,398 Approve – 1,368 Against
CONSOLIDATION

Student Advocacy: Purpose, Patience, Partnership - 1987→1990→1992
Supt. Philip Thompson, former SCA President
Lylburn Downing Students & Mr. James Lyle, 1957
W&L Prof. Ted DeLaney: Student in this Graduating Class, 1961
Downing School Pictures on Facebook: Lylburn Downing Alumni 1928-1965
1962 Lylburn Downing Faculty: School Library
Principal & Band Director: U.B. Broadneaux, Sr.; Rev. Lylburn Downing (Portrait)
Lylburn Downing High School, 1965
Last Graduating Class ~ Last School Faculty
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 “mammy” at Rockbridge 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 18 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 16, 1873. Proceeds of festival: $75.”

It was abandoned as a school for white children. But in January, 1880, 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. Hill’s” and his whole family. They had had the smallpox, 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 very long — just long enough to sell it to Jane Cobb in 1883 for $650, and long enough to be sued.

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

Street claimed he was barred 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].” Street had married his late mother after her husband died, and helped rear her children. Before moving to Lexington, Street had been living “in the lower end of the Valley, and was doing as well as could be expected with his very moderate means.”

Rhodes moved Street 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,” Street said, he was ready to go back home, but Rhodes talked him into staying and gave him a job as a collier. Street said he had

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Doug Harwood & Ted DeLaney on Lexington’s Educational Growth: RockbridgeHistory.org
DeLaney Article for RHS: Link HERE
Lexington, 1877 (Gray’s Map)

At bottom, S. Randolph Street:

Colored School (est. 1865)

Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (1865)
(Randolph St. United Methodist Church)
Robert Lee Clark: 1914 Diploma, Grammar Grades (RHS Collections)
Lucy Diggs Slowe

b. 1885, moved to Lexington with Aunt → Lexington Freedmen’s School until Age 13 → H.S. in Baltimore
Howard University Valedictorian 1908; Oratory Student of Prof. Coralie Cook; 1st National Tennis Champion ATA
Co-Founder, AKA Sorority (1908) and National Assoc. of College Women (1922); 1st Dean of Women, Howard U (1922)
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Local Students
Lexington’s Two Black Schools
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
Parent ~ Community Advocacy: Home & School League
1922 Name-Specific Petition to Build a New School: “Colored People Aroused”
Parent ~ Community Advocacy: Home & School League

1922 Name-Specific Petition to Build a New School: “Colored People Aroused”
Lexington Finances New School for Black Students, Diamond St.
Dedication and Speech by Rev. Lylburn L. Downing Sep. 1927
Lylburn Downing School opened here in 1927 after the Home and School League, an organization of local Black parents and citizens, campaigned for equitable schools. Built with financial support from the Black community, Rockbridge County, and the Rosenwald Fund, the countywide school first served grades 1-9 and expanded to include a high school in the 1940s. Desegregation closed the original edifice in 1965, but the newer buildings became Lexington’s middle school. Lylburn Downing (1862-1937) was born enslaved in Lexington, attended Lincoln University, and was pastor of Roanoke’s Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church for more than 40 years. He was a long-time advocate for African American education.

Department of Historic Resources, 2021
Lylburn Liggins Downing

b. enslaved Lexington, 1862; attended Randolph St. Freedmen’s School, Graduated & Ordained, Lincoln University; Presbyterian Pastor in Roanoke, Virginia Educational Advocate; School Namesake & Dedication Speaker: 1927

Rev. Downing’s 1927 Address echoed in Mike Blankenship’s speech: LDMS Graduation 2019
This is to certify that we the undersigned parents of the pupils who completed the work at the Lyburn 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 a sum of $85.00 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 meet the demand. We will do anything cheaper than sending our children away.

Signed:
Sylvestor Evans
Mrs. H. L. Walker
James Coleman
Roxie Hughes

PS. The above agreement is to funding to amount of $5.00 per person.
Building Further ➔ New Students ➔ New High School

Left: Lylburn Downing Students, 1930s
Right: Sylvester Evans: 1932 petition signatory, longtime school steward, Grandfather to Lex School Board Member, Vice Mayor Marylin Evans Alexander
Building Further ➔ New High School, Class 1944

Left: First Graduating High School Class, 1944
1940s PTA Gathering in Lylburn Downing Auditorium ~ Gymnasium
Family Legacies, Leadership, Groundbreakers

Stanley Land: Son, Vivian Haliburton’44; Grandson, Rockbridge Teacher Jacob Haliburton
Downing Class Pres. 1965 \( \rightarrow \) Rockbridge High’70 \( \rightarrow \) First Black Scholarship for UVA Football
UVA ’74 + Ed School \( \rightarrow \) Rockbridge HS Teacher & Coach \( \rightarrow \) Businessman; Family Genealogist
UVA Documentary Film: Athletics & Desegregation

UVA Homecoming Ceremony 2021

Stanley Land, Rockbridge High ’70

7th Grade Class President at Downing, 1965
Notable LDHS Alums, Teachers, Artists, Leaders

**Dolores Jones: Lylburn Downing Music Teacher, Opera Singer**

**Justice Leander Shaw: Principal’s Son; LDHS ’48, 1st Black Justice Florida Supreme Court**

**Prof. Ted DeLaney: LDHS ‘61, W&L ‘85, later W&L History Dept. Chair**

Namesake of new DeLaney Center for Southern Race Relations, Culture, Politics
Trial Integration Here: Fall 1964
10 years after Brown v. Board

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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
Natural Bridge Elementary School, 1965-6
First Year of School Integration, Rockbridge County
Ms. Anne McAlphin, 4th Grade Class
Major Shifts in People and Place
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Who Studies? What Communities do Students Come From?
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Expanded Course Offerings at Consolidated HS

Proposed by Teachers: ‘Master Plan 1987’

Social Studies Courses:
RHS, LHS, NBHS
See Columns 2, 4

New Electives Possible:
- Sociology & Psychology
- Current Affairs, Civil War
- Introduction to Law, Third World Development

Course Offerings Compared To Teachers’ Wish List

What courses Rockbridge County high students can take sometimes depends on whether high school they attend. A student attending Lexington High School, for example, can take German and Latin but not Spanish. Students attending Natural Bridge and Rockbridge High schools can take Spanish but courses in Latin and German are not available to them.

These differences in course offerings among the three county high schools are being cited by promoters of a consolidated high school as reasons a consolidated program is needed.

If all of the county students attended a single high school, they would have equal educational opportunities and probably have expanded course offerings, supporters say.

When the teacher-administrator committees met last fall to determine educational goals and strategies that would be included in the ‘Master Plan’ report, they drafted a list of courses they would like to see at the high school level. That program of studies for grades 9-12 has been released by Jay at the various public hearings on the master plan.

The proposed program of studies includes some courses, such as advanced level courses, that are not currently offered at any of the three county high schools. Other courses are offered at one school and not the others.

To give an idea of where the course offerings of the different high schools stand in comparison with what many teachers would like them to be, below follows a list of courses in the proposed program of studies and the economics and sociology class Socio-Psychology — none except for the economics/sociology class at NBHS. Current Affair — none.

HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical Education — none

SOCIAL STUDIES

Sociology & Psychology, Current Affair, Civil War, Introduction to Law, Third World Development

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

French 1, 2, 3 — through Latin 3 at LHS
Spanish 1, 2, 3 — non — NBHS and RHS
German 1, 2 — LHS

INTRODUCTORY JAPANESE

MATH

Basic Skill (Remedial) — NBHS, LHS and RHS

General Math 9 and 10 — NBHS and RHS

Pre-Algebra — NBHS, LHS and RHS

Algebra — NBHS, LHS and RHS

Advanced Algebra — none

Algebra II and Trigonometry — NBHS, LHS and RHS

Geometry — NBHS, LHS and RHS

Advanced Geometry — none

Analytic — NBHS, LHS and RHS

Calculus — LHS and RHS

Consumer Math — NBHS, RHS and LHS

Advanced Computer — LHS has Computer Science 1, 2, and 3. NBHS has Computer Science and 2 and has Computer Science 1 and 2.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Learning Disabled — LHS, RHS

Speech/Ear disorders — non

Severe Conduct — none

Programs for special needs students
January 2021: Governor’s Commission, Virginia Humanities, Virginia Africana, Collaboration with School Administrators, Faculty, Museum & History Professionals

New State-Required Elective: African-American Humanities, Social Studies Licensing
Diamond-Green Hill Historical Walking Tour & Lylburn Downing School History Scavenger Hunt

First Baptist Church, Lylburn Downing Alumni Room-LCS School Board Room
Local Students & Educators: Some Profiles...
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Coralie Franklin Cook
Speaking with Power, Speaking through Art

b. enslaved Lexington 1861 → Family’s Educational Arcs~Freedmen’s School? → Storer College Alum & Faculty Chair, Oratory Dept, Howard Univ.; Pres. D.C. Arts Council; Suffragist w/Susan B. Anthony & W.E.B. DuBois
Eliza Bannister Walker
Social Networks, Local Activism, Poetry with Purpose

b. Natural Bridge 1874, Colored Graded School; Trained as Nurse in DC (Howard)
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, Oberlin College, B.A. 1900

Top, 2\textsuperscript{nd} 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*
From Lexington to the Nation’s Capital

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

Board Members: Luminary Educators, Suffragists, NAACP Founders

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

b. 1885, moved to Lexington with Aunt ➔ Lexington Freedmen’s School until Age 13 ➔ H.S. in Baltimore
Howard University Valedictorian 1908; Oratory Student of Prof. Coralie Cook; 1st National Tennis Champion ATA
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From Orphan to Dean ➔ Inspiring Women’s Leadership
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Stanley Land, Denise Jones Smith, Charlotte Alexander, Preston Evans, Byron Winchester, Halle Kline, Debbie Funkhouser, Sascha Goluboff, Alison Bell, Rebecca Walters, Phillip Thompson

And My Own Most Influential Teacher … Peggy Vaughan, Albemarle HS