

Edwin Washington Project Accomplishments and Developments



Figure 1 Some of the planning committee for the November conference.

November 10 Conference. “Dirt Don’t Burn,” will be a major discussion with the people of Loudoun and neighboring communities on November 10, 2018 at Douglass School, 407 E. Market St. Leesburg. Loudoun Schools is hosting and encourages families to attend and learn about or share the history of segregation and Loudoun schools. We will also thank LCPS for helping us explore Black education.



Figure 2 New Artifact

Dirt Don’t Burn reports: In 2019, we will produce written, in-depth studies on civil rights, transportation, academics, one-room schools, disease prevention, the role of home economics during the Great Depression and many other topics.

Permanent Home: We would like a permanent home for our dedicated volunteer staff to conduct future research and protect the documents and our emerging artifact collection. This would also be a place for the public to do their own research.

Partners: We work with academic institutions, churches and historical clubs in Loudoun, as well as the Oatlands Historic House and Gardens, the Archives of the Circuit Court of Loudoun, the Black History Committee of the Friends of the Balch Library, the Library of Virginia, Virginia State University and many other facilities.

Civil Rights: The African-American community’s struggle for education from 1865 to 1968 will be a major topic at the November event. It was a great Civil Rights effort led by determined parents, the NAACP, African-American PTA’s, and sympathetic white citizens who sometimes donated money and services, like Charlotte Noland of Foxcroft or the Mellon family and the Middleburg Community Center. We see our project as a monument to that struggle, because Black history must never be forgotten and because the lessons about combating racism have value today around the world.



Figure 3 Foundation Stone From Carter School.

Archeology: In 2016, we discovered the remains of the Bluemont Colored School in a forest and recently located the remains of the Carter White School at Dulles Airport. In addition, we believe that after the Mountain Gap Colored School burned, its timbers, rocks and other materials were likely buried in a pit along the property line, near Route 15. Two archeologists from the Balch Library and Middleburg Academy have volunteered to uncover objects that could inform us about building materials and educational tools like pencils and slate boards. Our plan is to make this an educational experience for students and citizen volunteers; but we also need funds for equipment and supplies.

Related, we also helped others restore or understand historical schools, by sharing blueprints and other material from deeds and old maps. For example, at the Ashburn Colored School, we provided data on furniture, including an upright piano. We also assisted research on the Sterling and the Unison-Bloomfield white schools.

History is Personal and often Brave: We are interviewing former students and teachers, an effort which will ramp up in 2019, so we need more volunteers. Heroes have emerged, such as a child who walked along a busy rail road track to reach school on time, one day almost being struck by the engine! There was also a white garage owner who defied the law and bused African-American children to school. There was also Edwin Washington, for whom the project is named, who, as the smoke of the Civil War cleared, negotiated access to school while keeping his job as a waiter.



Figure 4 Interview in Conklin, near South Riding.



Figure 5 Fragile Documents

We also discovered a massive trove of handwritten petitions by white and African-American parents. The Black component is particularly striking because it took place during segregation. Parents and teachers joined hands to ask for equality, buses, repairs for schools and a better life for children. We are transcribing all of these papers and also researching who signed them, such as George H. Russ, born into slavery in Oatlands. He rose up and was elected by the Black community to a national conference to fight segregation, and in the 1930's signed a petition to support Black education. Heroes like these are being revealed for the first time in decades.

What was the Curriculum? A priority is to understand the quality of instruction. How did it compare to that used in white schools? Did it fortify stereotypes? Did it provide the tools for a better life?

Page | 3

Digital Map: Our Chief Cartographer is developing an on-line map showing the location of historic schools (white and “colored”, routes, boundaries of traditional African-American Communities, etc. This product will enable users to drive or walk to the sites, making possible self-guided tours. Local political leaders have already noted that this could also spur tourism and Loudoun’s economy. To find the schools, we research old documents and physically visit each site to give it a street address or Lat/Long coordinates. That data is then transferred to the cartographer. As you can imagine, thousands of hours and many gallons of gasoline are required.



Figure 6 Finding Bluemont Colored School



Figure 7 Teachers at Carver.

Social Media: Our Facebook Page and website are great ways to see almost daily discoveries. We will also present a digital hub in 2019 linking significant databases and other research resources, to our work and other efforts with those in neighboring counties so that we can craft a unified, regional understanding of educational evolution.

Statistical Analysis: Volunteers examine handwritten statistical data back to 1870, to develop an understanding of the evolution of Black education in Loudoun. We will also compare white and “colored” educational progress.

Scanning and Boxes Many thousands of document images are now in our digital drive, to preserve the important historical data forever and enable analysis without having to personally handle fragile documents,



Figure 8 Piano from Ashburn Colored School

some so weak that a mask must be worn during examination, due to dust. Thanks to donors, we obtained computers and a high-end museum-grade scanner, but we also need funds for special preservation-grade folders and boxes.

High School Education: The first accredited High School was Douglass, started in 1941; but limited unaccredited secondary schooling also happened between 1930 and 1941 on Union Street in Leesburg. We also recently discovered a woman probably received such training in 1892 in Lovettsville. She was the daughter of a Civil War spy. Our research is aimed at understanding the impact of their education.

Who were the Teachers? We are compiling biographical information on each African-American teacher who served in Loudoun, up to 1968. Specialized reports also identify which teachers were trained at various “normal” schools.

Who were the students? Volunteers are compiling lists of the students who attended public schools back to 1870 and some information on students in Quaker schools just after the Civil War. We plan to merge this and other data at Strathmore College and the National Archives into a database to enable anyone to study the career of students and teachers, while also protecting information controlled by state law.

Catalog: By November 2018, we will produce a detailed, annotated catalog to enable researchers to understand our holdings. The system of cataloging was developed at the Department of Library/Information Science at the Catholic University of America.



Figure 9 Edyth Harris, a teacher in 1930



Figure 10 Children in Saint Louis. Photo, courtesy of Phyllis Cook Taylor.

Photographs: We are looking in private and government holdings for historic photographs of students, teachers, etc.

Volunteers Keep Costs Low: According to members of the Country School Association of America, our project is the most extensive of its kind in the country. Ordinarily, that would require hundreds of thousands of dollars every year; but our researchers are volunteers from academia, industry, the general public and even from other countries.

- A German student helped in 2017 to study a major 1926 school fire. Four more German students will help in 2018, thanks to the George Marshall center. Students from the Loudoun School for the Gifted also helped.
- Many volunteers have advanced degrees or significant commercial training, ensuring we manage according to the highest standards.



Figure 11 Reviewing petitions.



Figure 13 Volunteers survey old structures.



Figure 12 Team members and some donors discuss document preservation.