

Assuming we are as successful in our efforts as I believe we will be, the head of the NAACP in Loudoun, Phillip Thompson, recommended we also set up similar study groups in other counties in Virginia and the South, not only to truthfully explain what happened in the past; but also to use the research to argue against various forms of segregation abroad.

The project is named after a teenager who lived in Leesburg just after the Civil War and who wanted an education. He worked in a bar and was allowed to go to school only in between errands. What we learned from Quaker records is that he not only attended but also wrote about the importance of education. Keep in mind that after the war most African-Americans didn't know how to read or write. Children went to class during the day and their parents attended at night in order to use literacy to avoid being cheated and to prosper. This was also the time of Jim Crow. Most monuments are to soldiers. Our project is a monument to all of the Edwin Washington's that existed, their sisters and parents and all of the people who helped African-Americans to obtain a proper education.

Using interviews and records from 1846 to 1969 owned by LCPS which were lost for decades, as well as records in private holdings and the Circuit Court of Loudoun County, we are telling a story of great educational bravery. For example, we have uncovered hand written petitions by parents demanding improvements in schooling, and asking for toilets, repairs, better transportation and fair wages. All of those are being transcribed and will be published in a roll of honor. Our study is called *Dirt Don't Burn* after a letter we found asking for wood to heat a school. Our plan is compare white and African-American education and show who attended school, where the buildings were located, who instructed the children and discuss the curriculum and how schools were built and maintained. We are also developing an on-line map that will show the routes children took to school (white and African-American) and compare the quality of the ride.

All of the labor is done by volunteers with great credentials. We have a Professor of English, a PhD candidate in Education, an expert in Management, a cartographer formerly of the Bureau of Land Management, and an expert in digital preservation formerly of Oatlands Plantation and the Smithsonian, as well as the Chairman of the Board of Oatlands Plantation. I am a retired U.S. diplomat and specialist in disaster management and library/information management. We also have ordinary citizens from Loudoun helping with transcriptions. What we need is funding for equipment and software to scan and catalog thousands of records so that they can be seen by the public. In addition, we need to buy archival boxes and folders to protect the documents and maps. There is also the website which must be maintained, and a significant amount of travel to private holdings with documents to fill in informational gaps. If you could help us with those costs, we would be most grateful.

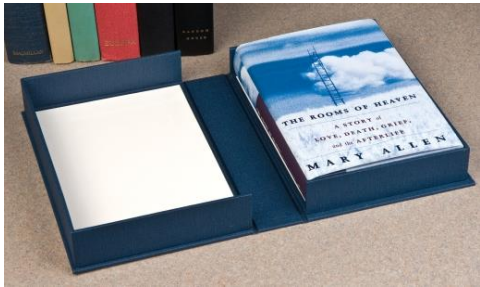
Attached is a catalog of immediate needs for which we need help, as well as two newspaper articles on the project, which also describe our support from the Virginia House of Delegates and Senate.

If you would like to assist, even only for a portion, please send a tax-deductible check to:

The Edwin Washington Project
26128 Talamore Drive, South Riding, Va. 20152

Physical Preservation: Book and Document Cases and Boxes \$1800

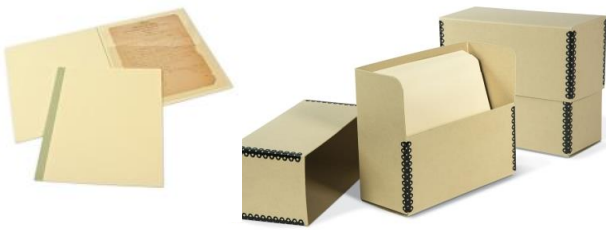
Cases for Books:



Samples of Books and Papers to be protected:



Cases for Documents and Maps:



Digital Preservation Supporting Research and Digital Backup

PC's

Dell Inspiron 15 5000 laptop x Two. Each is \$600. Used for remote research and GIS Mapping project.

Collection Management Software



\$870

The **Donations are made to The Edwin Washington Project, 26128 Talamore Drive, South Riding, Va. 20152**

washingtonproject.org

We are cataloging thousands of records, all of which are also being scanned. This project will enable the public easy access over the internet.



Expo Spotlights Loudoun's Black History

2017-02-27 2017-02-28

Danielle Nadler, Loudoun
Now

During the final weekend of Black History Month, many gathered at an events center in Sterling to learn about and reflect on the black men and women who are part of Loudoun County's story.

The Black History Month Expo, held Saturday at the Cascade Overlook Event Center, was organized by the Loudoun Freedom Center. The event featured breakout sessions that gave attendees a chance to hear and discuss a variety of topics—from a presentation on the county's slave communities to a discussion on how to “bridge the STEM gap in African-American education.”

Kevin D. Grigsby, author of “[From Loudoun To Glory](#)” and “Howardsville: The Journey of an African-American Community in Loudoun County, Virginia,” said not many people know that more than 300 African American men from Loudoun County fought in the Civil War. When he learned that in his research, he said, “That was really moving to me. That's a story in itself.”

Local historian Larry Roeder spoke about his [efforts to preserve historic documents](#) that tell the stories of Loudoun's early black citizens. He showed the audience photos of several petitions addressed to county or school officials that were signed by black residents. “They wrote these petitions to ask for toilets, teachers, roads. ... Sometimes they got it. Sometimes they did not,” he said.

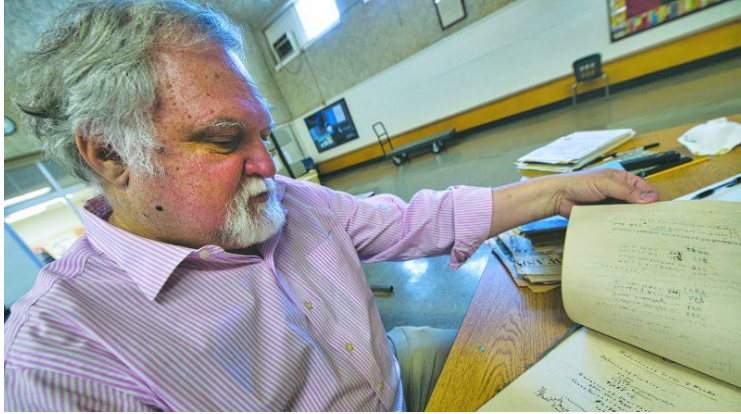
Roeder is creating what he called “a role of honor” that includes the names of everyone who signed the petitions, which will be safely stored in acid-free, chemical-free boxes. “Because we believe this is a national treasure,” he said.

Speakers also included Rep. Barbara Comstock (R-VA-10); Leesburg Town Council member Ron Campbell; Supervisor Kristen Umstattd (D-Leesburg); Sheila Coates, of Black Women United for Action; Loudoun County Historic Preservation Planner Heidi Siebentritt; Donna Bohanon, of the Friends of Thomas Balch Library's Black History Committee; Northern Virginia Community College STEM Coordinator Tosin Adetoro; and Eric Larson, historic records manager in the Loudoun County Circuit Court, among others.

Learn more about the Loudoun Freedom Center at loudounfreedomfoundation.com.

*dnadler@loudounnow.com
twitter.com/danielle_nadler*

The Edwin Washington Project. www.edwinwashingtonproject.org 703-867-2056.



Once Lost, Now Found: Volunteers Discover and Preserve Forgotten Black Student Records

2016-04-28 2016-04-29 Danielle Nadler Loudoun Now

“It was a typical day’s work.” That’s how Sue Hall and others in the Loudoun school system’s Student Records Department describe the morning two years ago when they walked into the Union Street School in Leesburg to take a look around.

The building, which once served as an all-black school, had been all but abandoned. But they got a tip that there may—just may—be student records in there worth saving.

Hall, Donna Kroiz and others noticed a pile of a dozen dusty boxes stashed under a staircase. They pulled out a couple and lifted the lids.

Under a thick layer of dust, spider webs and even rat droppings, sat what local history experts are calling “a treasure trove” almost lost. Stacked in worn cartons were students’ classroom assignments and grades, teachers’ evaluations, correspondence between superintendents and school boards, and several letters from Loudoun’s black community petitioning for equal education, among other significant records.

“We couldn’t quite believe it,” said Hall, the school system’s record archivist. “We thought, these should be saved.”

Now a team of volunteers, led by Larry Roeder, chair for research on the Friends of Thomas Balch Library’s Black History Committee, have launched a year-long project to catalogue and preserve the once-lost documents that tell the story of Loudoun County schools between the Civil War and the end of racial segregation.

They’re calling the effort [The Edwin Washington Project](#), named after a black teen who, between jobs, attended school in Leesburg in the 1860s.

Their focus is to get a better understanding of what school was like for black students specifically during the 125 years the county's public schools were separated by race.



Figure 1 Larry Roeder with the boxes of student records from the segregation era.

“Their story is in these records, that sat untouched for 50 years,” Roeder said. “We want to document what schools they attended, what they studied, who taught them. That’s never been done before.”

Discovering Untold Stories

Two to three days a week, Roeder and his assistant, Tony Arciero, put on dust respirator masks, roll up their sleeves and get to work.

On those days, they take over the gymnasium at the Round Hill Center; once the town's elementary school, it now houses Loudoun County student records. They carefully thumb

through letters, grade books and other reports, some dating back to the 1840s, as they decide how best to organize the material.

Each day, they uncover a new part of Loudoun's history, Roeder said. Much of it is the part that is little talked about. The county was one of the last jurisdictions in the nation to desegregate its schools. It took intervention from U.S. courts to convince Loudoun leaders to integrate schools in 1969, 15 years after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling that segregation was unconstitutional.

A stack of now-worn, dried-out petitions from the black community to the superintendent and School Board illustrate just how inequitable some of the school conditions were. They asked for more classroom space, for repairs to toilets that had been broken for months, for a sanitary drinking system—students in black schools took turns scooping water from a bucket—as well as more school supplies.

One fragile sheet of paper is, most likely, the very first petition the black community submitted to Superintendent Oscar Emerick and the school board requesting “a suitable, up-to-date high school ... for the benefit of the colored children of our said County.” Seventy-two people signed it.

In another box, Roeder found a letter from those same individuals to Emerick in 1941 inviting the superintendent to speak at the opening celebration of the brand new Douglass School.

“You see the slow progress,” Roeder said. “I think Martin Luther King would have been proud of them (Loudoun's black community) because of their approach. It was non-violent, and they used their education to improve the system.”

Letters from longtime superintendent Emerick show the educators' inner struggle with splitting black and white students and teachers. He led the school system through some of its most transformative years, from 1917 to 1957.



(Photo by Douglas Graham/Loudoun Now)

In the early 1940s, he told the Board of Supervisors and School Board that they should seriously consider integrating the schools before the federal government forced them to. In one letter to the school board, Emerick said the school system had done pretty well for white students but not so well for black students. He wrote, “That is prejudice.”

“You can see this clear build up to *Brown vs. Board of Education* within these documents,” Arciero said. “It was happening right here.”

Preserving History

The small team of individuals who found the records and are now working to preserve them have gotten statewide attention.

[The General Assembly adopted a resolution](#) in March that praised Kroiz, Hall, Roeder and others for their work to save the material. Del. John Bell (D-87), who sponsored the bill, said this week, “It’s a wonderful thing what they did. Frankly, we came close to losing a very valuable piece of history.”

The resolution includes language meant to protect the records from destruction. “Now, they can’t be ruined,” Roeder said with a smile.

Roeder works as the data manager at the Library Information of Science Department at the Catholic University of America and is adapting what he’s learned in organizing the university’s massive amounts of records to this project.

He and Arciero, with the help of volunteers from the school system and other history buffs, are digitizing the records and organizing them into an online database at loudounschoolproject.wordpress.com that the public can easily navigate. They are also working on a book that summarizes what they found.

The records are property of Loudoun County Public Schools and, initially, will be housed in archival boxes at the Round Hill Center. Eventually, Roeder would like to see them moved to the Thomas Balch Library in Leesburg where the public can more easily access them.



(Photo by Douglas Graham/Loudoun Now)

In an email this week, Superintendent Eric Williams praised the Student Records Department staff for going well beyond their job descriptions.

“Preserving educational records is preserving a unique window into our history; especially when those records reflect a community that history often ignores,” he wrote. “I’m proud Loudoun County Public Schools played a role in making sure these records, which could so easily have been ignored and lost, are protected and available to scholars and those researching their family history.”

Roeder and Arciero are asking for the community’s help to complete the Edwin Washington Project. They want to interview men and women who attended or worked in Loudoun’s segregated schools. They are also

looking for volunteers to help in their preservation efforts. Those interested can email Roeder at roederaway@yahoo.com.

dnadler@loudounnow.com
twitter.com/danielle_nadler