

THE CATHARPIN SCHOOL

Gainesville School District #2
White
1874-1936

The first Catharpin schoolhouse was built in 1874 on one acre of land given to the School Board by the Buckley family on the north side of Sudley Road in the northeast quadrant of the intersection of a private lane leading to Putman's Ford on Bull Run at the Loudoun county line (now Sanders Land and part of State Route 705). This land was part of the old Chapman farm, which was a large plantation owned, but not operated, by the Chapman family, which owned and operated Chapman's Mill now known as Beverley's Mill, on Bull Run at Thoroughfare Gap. Before the Catharpin school was built, the children of families living on Chapman lands went to a private school operated in St. John's Episcopal Church, one mile west of Catharpin.¹

That first school was a small, one-room building. One of the first teachers was Mr. Hugh Powell, who read law while his students worked on their lessons. He was admitted to the bar, moved to Texas and was elected mayor of Ft. Worth! He boarded with the postmaster, George Sanders, and his family at their Mount Pleasant farm.²

By the late 1890s the one school was not big enough so, in May of 1897³, the Gainesville School Board decided to build a new schoolhouse. The old building was sold to Mr. Frederick Sanders who had been serving as postmaster since his father's death and continued to do so until his own death in 1932. He paid \$30 for the building which he moved on rollers pulled by a horse named Dandy to a location north of his store and post office now known as Alvey's Store. The old schoolhouse was used as a chicken coop and later as a dwelling. Finally, it was again moved and used as a warehouse for Sander's grist mill.⁴ In 1940, both the mill and the old school building were torn down.

¹E. R. Conner, III. "Catharpin, Virginia, A Trading Center of Western Prince William County", *Echoes of History*, November, 1975, pp. 66-67.

²Ibid., p.68.

³Gainesville District School Board minutes of May 22, 1897.

⁴Conner, p.68.



The Catharpin School. The right side of the building was the original schoolhouse. The bell tower was added in 1898 and the addition (left) was built in 1913.

(Courtesy of PWC Historical Commission)

On July 17, 1897 the Board accepted the low bid of Mr. E.C. Taylor for \$448.80 to build a two-story schoolhouse. However, ten days later, on July 27, Mr. Taylor said that he had forgotten to include the cost of the roof, which would add \$40 to his proposal, so the Board had to call for bids again.⁵ In the interest of time, it was decided to build a one-story schoolhouse and, again, Mr. Taylor was the low bidder at \$335. The carpenter who worked on the schoolhouse was Mr. Nalls from Greenwich. The one-room building with frame walls a metal covered gable roof was painted yellow and was ready to open for the 1898-99 school year. It, like most other county schools of the day, had two privies out in back, one for boys and the other for girls. Katie Bell was the first teacher in that new building; long time residents remember other teachers: Etta Lynn, Ben Sanders, Mattie Matthews, Eleanor Wilkins.⁶

In 1913, there were so many pupils that the teacher needed an assistant to handle them all. In the summer of that year, an addition was put up at the west end of the existing building at a cost of \$1800. The carpenter was Mr. I. I. Anderson who had recently worked on the nearby Sanders house. Eight grades were taught in the enlarged school building. One of the two first teachers of the school was the same Eleanor Wilkins who had been teaching at the older school but now she was married and known as Eleanor Brower. Other teachers included Neville Dogan, Miss Annie Troth, Frances Dorsey Ristedt and Alice Metz Lynn. The school bell, installed in

⁵Gainesville District School Board minutes of July 27, 1897.

⁶Conner, p.68.