

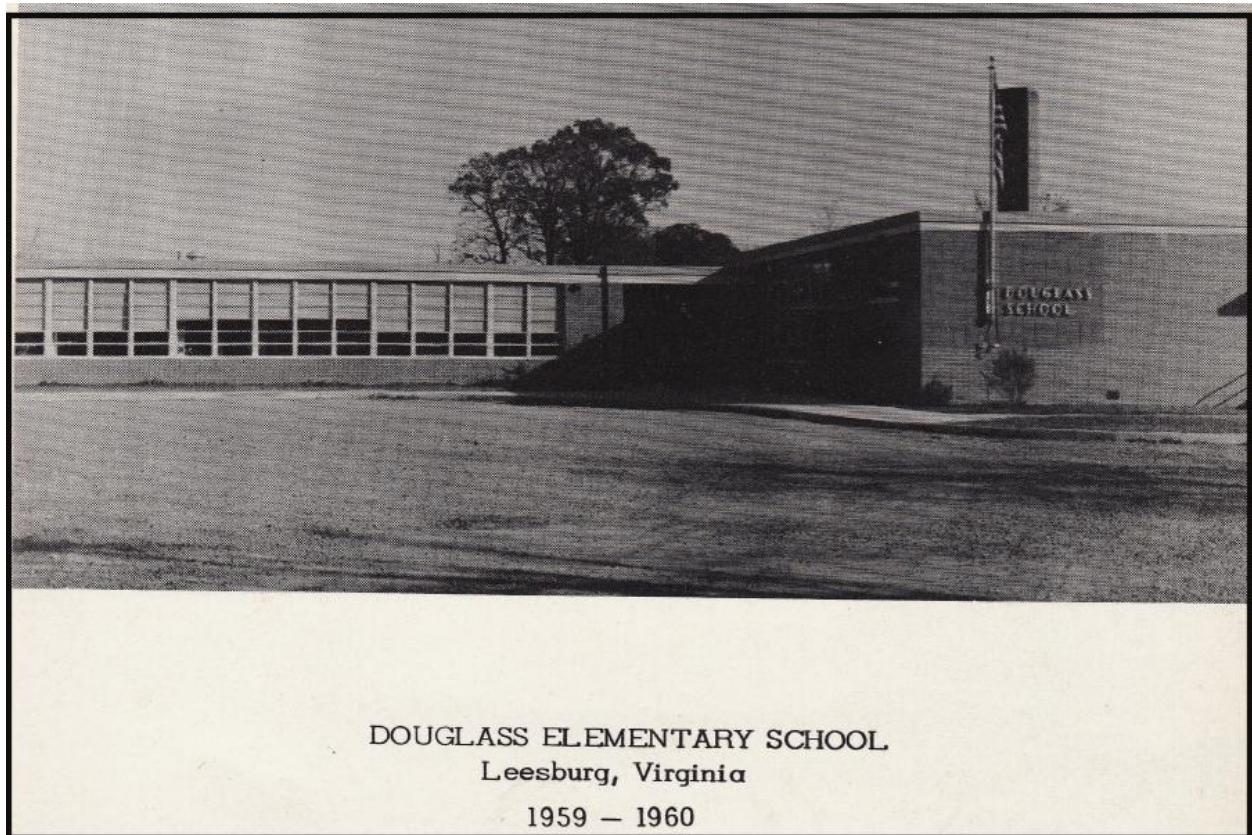
## Snapshot History of Leesburg Schools for African-Americans

### Contemporary Douglass Elementary Building:

The school was built from July 2011 to July 2012 and opened on August 27, 2012 (First day of school 2012-2013 AY) (Torraca, 2016)

### 1958 – 2011 Douglass Elementary School

Prior to the contemporary structure, a Douglass Elementary was built in 1958 on land purchased in 1956. Between then and 1968 (when integration came to Loudoun) it was the only elementary school for African-Americans. It then continued as an integrated school until closing in 1982. Demolition began in June of 2011 and was completed in July of the same year.



*Figure 1 Douglass Elementary (the 1958-2011 structure. Photo courtesy LCPS*

A fresh set of eight rooms, and an auditorium, etc were added to the Douglass Elementary School in 1953/54 at a cost of \$150,000, the source being the State Appropriation Fund. (Emerick, 1950, March 1).

“From 1982-2001 the site was used as a community center where programs like Head Start; and special education programs were held. (note: we have a lot of Head Start and Special Ed documents in the archives).

After 2001 the building stopped holding classes, programs, or activities, and instead was used for school board offices and storage. In 2010 Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) began considering demolishing the original school structure. (Chamblin, 2006) “

## 1941-1957 Douglass High School

A one story brick school called Douglass High School for African American students was erected in 1941, which continued as a segregated institution until 1968, when integration came to Loudoun.

In the 1930's fund raising by the African-American Community earned enough to buy land for a High School which then conveyed to the county for \$1 on Dec 16, 1940. Douglass High School was then constructed in September of 1941.

In 1951/52, Douglass High School received an additional six classrooms, a kitchen and gymnasium at a cost of \$150,000 of which the entire amount came from a Literary Fund loan. (Emerick, 1950, March 1)

**1952.** The County School Board on April 1, 1952 resolved to make application for the recently allocated State School Construction Fund in the amount of \$97,481.62 for building an addition to the Douglass High School, also to consider selected architect for this addition. Source: OL Emerick memo to County School Board, March 28, 1952, Archives Catalog Folder 2.2 County School Board, 1918-1952.

With desegregation in 1968, Douglass High School became a middle school, then a special education and alternative school, now known as the Douglass Alternative School, as well as a Community Center.



*Figure 2 Douglass High School for African-American Students. Courtesy, LCPS*

## 1883 School for African-Americans (later Leesburg High School)

Known as the Union Street building or Loudoun County Training School, the structure is still standing. It is a frame construction, though a 1940 survey said it was constructed of brick in 1883 and consisted of five classrooms at a construction cost of \$2,000. An addition was also supposed to be have been provided in 1935 for \$2,000 (Jenkins, Haydon, & Long, 1940, February).



*Figure 3 Union Street Building - Now used for storage*

Title for the Union Street property was held by the School Board in Deed Book 6T, Folio 498, which is available in the archives of the Circuit Court in Leesburg. The school was described as a five room frame school house. **Source for Sale Information:** Poster for Public Auction, School Box 2, Archives of the Circuit Court of Loudoun County, Leesburg.

**1930:** With two added rooms for two years of high-school instruction the Leesburg School becomes the first secondary school for blacks, though not accredited. As the [Loudoun County Training School](#), it graduated a class of five in 1935. Diplomas of its last graduating class of 1940 bear the name Leesburg High School.

**Question:** There are two floors to the building. We gather that the top floor was used for limited secondary education, but we not sure about the bottom floor. Also, not sure where the office for the Principal would have been or even if offices existed.



## Prior to 1883

Some education of African-Americans between end of the end of the war in 1865 and the establishment of the 1870 constitution was done by white Quakers, often from out-of-state. Not to be forgotten however were also African-American teachers like William O. Robey of Leesburg who started in his home the second Freedmen's Bureau School in 1866. Except for a small amount in rent, the school was fully supported by Leesburg's African American community (Morefield, 2004).

A preliminary examination of Freedmen records showed that as of September 30, 1866, nine farm schools had been established in Loudoun, all free, of which four were sustained by benevolent societies and one managed by a "intelligent, educated colored man," undoubtedly William Obediah Robey. Unfortunately, that particular report didn't identify the locations of the schools, nor their teachers (Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, pp. Roll 45, 489-490). It did however point out that African-Americans took every chance to school their kids, when the opportunity arose; but the places of instruction had to be in old churches and inexpensive buildings. Robey's school was in his home, for example. A different report of the same date listed only three teachers in Loudoun under the supervision of the Bureau. Two operated in Leesburg and thus could have been at the same school, and one was in Waterford (List of Freedmen's Schools, September, 1866: Report of Schools under the Supervision of the Bureau, 1866, September (Roll 12 (M-1053) (Page 268)).

**<sup>1</sup>Note: We don't know if these structures still exist or if they don't, when they were sold or torn down. That needs to be added to the research.**

Town	# of Schools	Instructor	Supporting society	# of Students	Ave Attendance	# of Males	# of Females	# over 16
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<sup>1</sup> Roll 12 is in the Balch Library.

Leesburg	1	William O. Robey <sup>2</sup>	None	29	16	8	12	16
Leesburg	1	Caroline Thomas	Friends Ass of Phil	48	32	26	22	4
Waterford	1	Sarah Steer <sup>3</sup>	Friends Ass of Phil	43	35	20	23	8

## Caroline Thomas in Leesburg 1867

In a report in the *Intelligencer* on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1867, we find that “a delegation of Quakers left Philadelphia for Leesburg, and used the Alexandria, Loudon and Hampshire Railway to Belmont, and then by stage to Leesburg where they visited the school of Caroline Thomas. “It is a comfortable frame building, a few squares from her lodgings. We found her engaged in teaching, therefore had a good opportunity of judging the capability of her pupils. We were well satisfied with their advancement. Some of the parents were present, who expressed much gratitude for this privilege for themselves and children. “

There is little doubt about gratitude. In Loudoun County and throughout the old South, African Americans were anxious for education. As Butchart reported, teachers through the South were overwhelmed by the interest of the formerly enslaved to be schooled, turning from an inferior class to equality or better. We can see this in Thomas’s experience teaching night and day, children and adults. “The teacher is earnest and zealous in her work, both in the school room and among the colored people

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<sup>2</sup> According to the US Census for Loudoun (1870), William O. Robey was born in 1819 in Fairfax County, was an African-American and both a minister and a public school teacher who lived in Leesburg. He died September 21, 1888 in Loudoun. According to the 1860 census for Leesburg, he then worked as a blacksmith.

<sup>3</sup> According to US Census for Loudoun (1870), Sarah Steer (born 1840) lived at home at the residence of her father Samuel Steer, and worked as a Public School teacher. She was also an editor of a Waterford antislavery newspaper. A decade earlier, according to the 1860 Census, she had no occupation. In 1850, she lived with her family in Baltimore where her father worked as a clerk. In 1880, she was still living at home, but then had no occupation. In 1904, she married J. Edward Walker. By 1890, she was head of the household and her sister Ella Steer (born Nov, 1843) had become a school teacher. According to the 1910 Census, Sarah had passed away, leaving J. Edward Walker as head of household inside of which Ella lived, though by then with no occupation. With them was her brother William. Of course, by then they were all of retirement age. She came from relative comfort, as her father in 1870 was a tax assessor worth \$11,000.

generally. During the winter she has held school several evenings in the week for adults, and assisted in organizing and supporting a literary association which has given opportunity for instructive reading and appropriate counsel. She believes this form of labor among these people is one of the most important aids in the work of elevation (Laing & Atlee, 1868).”

Thomas had really intended to make a go of teaching in Leesburg; but that proved impossible, due to social resistance and threats by Whites. Friends’ Intelligencer, Volume 26 referred to Thomas as having had to abandon her school in Leesburg because of the “impossibility of having a School House fit to teach in, and the unwillingness on our part to risk the health, and probably the life of any teacher under such circumstances. Having no other opening, we were very reluctantly compelled to part with her (JME, 1869/70).” From there, she moved to Lincoln. Her first employer was a Philadelphia Quaker body. In Lincoln, she was paid by a Long Island body.

From a report by Sidney B. Smith, Freedmen’s Bureau Agent for Loudoun Co of February 27<sup>th</sup> 1867, we also learned that “A lady,[ **Caroline Thomas\***] teaching a colored school here under the auspices of **the Friends Society Phil “Penn”** is obliged to live in a house of a Freedman or rather in one room of a house occupied by a colored family, or discontinue school, as she could not get boarded elsewhere. Hence she is annoyed not a little by the “Chivalry of the Old Dominion. A scurrilous paragraph appeared in one of the papers of this place some days ago in consequence of her having taken lodging where she now is, and denunciations of the most malignant character are suspected against her, by the people.” *\*Caroline Thomas, Quaker teacher from Philadelphia.* (1913, r.100 N187). This wasn’t a problem unique to Leesburg, as reported in nearby Manassas, Virginia, by Quaker instructor Speer in 1870 who said that prejudice against instructing African-Americans also excluded her from gaining living space with families of residents. At the time, Speer operated a school for over thirty (Society Secretary, 1870, p. pg 5).

In the *Intelligencer* for April 24, 1867, Thomas wrote about her housing problem as well. The problem is the reports are all past tense and is often impossible to know exactly when they were written, only when they were published.

“Caroline Thomas, at Leesburg, Va., in allusion to having found it impossible to procure board in any white family, cheerfully remarks: “Suffice it to say, I succeeded in getting a home amongst good, kind people, and the only fear is they will spoil me, for there is nothing they can do for me that is not done. They seem to understand by a kind of intuitive perception what I would like to have, which is all owing to their kind hearts; and the more I see of them, the more I wonder how anyone could treat them unkindly (JME, 1868).”

In the *Intelligencer* for Oct 21, 1867

For Loudoun, the teachers listed working for the Quakers were:

Sarah Ann Steer, Waterford

Caroline Thomas, Leesburg (JME, 1868).

## Documents Related to construction of Douglass High School

This page deals with the process of creating Douglass, including petitions from the citizens, legal briefs, letters to political leaders, etc. .

- **Perhaps the earliest formal request for a high school for “colored children,”** is an undated document signed by sixty-three citizens from all corners of the county, from Conklin, Purcellville, Middleburg, Leesburg, etc.
  - “To the hon. O.L. Emerick, Superintendent, and members of the School Board of Loudoun County, Virginia.
  - We, the undersigned citizens of Loudoun County, hereby respectfully pray your Hon. Board to build and establish a suitable up-to-date High School building and maintain therein an accredited high school for the benefit of the colored children of our said county.



- It is our information that your honorable Board is now maintaining 23 public schools for the accommodation of our colored children and we believe that our race is justly entitled to at least one High School in the county to be located in the discretion of your honorable board. After passing through said public schools we are now compelled to send our children out of the county for a complete high school education.
- We propose by private contributions to raise all the funds that we can – which we believe will not be inconsiderable – and, as we are informed, there are other sources of aid such as the Rosenwald and other funds for this purpose which need, of course, to be supplemented by an appropriation by your board out of public funds. Believing that this request is fair and reasonable one under the circumstances,
- Respectfully submitted: [Early Petition for a High School](#) (Location: LCPS Archives, Petition Folder).
- **Another undated petition** from the County-Wide League asks that the Gibons Lots be chosen for the “colored” high school. [Choosing the Gibons Lot](#). (Location: LCPS Archives, Petition Folder).

## Documents related to Douglass Elementary

### History

- **1928.** Insured for three years by LCPS for \$1500. *Insurance Record*. Purcellville: LCPS, pp 36/37.
- **1930 Petition** asked that “in appointing a fourth teacher in the Leesburg Colored public school; that your board will kindly appoint a High School and Normal school graduate, to fill the position of Principal in our public school. Hoping that our request may receive your most favorable consideration.” **Signed by 32 patrons and “tax payers.”** O.L. Emerick, Superintendent, replied in a positive way on May 14, 1930 “Your request by yourself and others that in appointing the fourth teacher of Leesburg we select a high school and normal school graduate has been received. I desire to say that it has been my plan to recommend a teacher with those qualifications or higher to our board and assign her to do work above the seventh grade in the school. ” *Location: LCPS Archives, petition folder.* [Leesburg 1930 Petition for Teacher](#).

- **Undated Petition** from Leesburg asking for a change “in the personnel of graded teachers in our colored public school.” Signed by 39 patrons and members of the Community League of Leesburg. [Undated Leesburg Petition](#) Location: LCPS Archives, Petition Folder.
- **Petition of May 10, 1932.** A petition from the Community League and patrons of the school asking for changes. [Petition May 10th, 1932 Leesburg](#) Location LCPS Archives. Petition Folder.
- **Joint petitions of May 16 and May 18, 1932** from the “citizens, patrons and friends” of the Leesburg Colored School asked that Miss Mary E. R. Waters and Miss Annie E. Harris remain as teachers for the term of 1932-33. What is interesting about this petition is that it was signed by both white citizens and “colored.”. The first page notes this, “White citizens 6 and colored patrons 80.”[Leesburg 1932 Petition](#) Location” LCPS Archives, petition folder.
- The white supporters were:
  - Charles Fauntleroy Harrison, Mayor of Leesburg. Harrison served two terms as mayor—from 1913 to 1917 and again from 1923 to 1934. Harrison would later play an important role regarding Douglass High School.
  - JRH Alexander was known as Peck, the Circuit Court Judge who presided over the 1933 [Crawford murder trial](#).
  - H.C. Littlejohn, who was a pharmacist in Leesburg.
  - A.B. Richard, who was the county treasurer
  - William Steadman
  - Louise P. King (L.M. Nurse)
- The joint petition of 1932 is a reminder that the struggle for proper education for African-Americans was a biracial effort, something the Superintendent for public education complained about once regarding the Conklin Colored School. His retort in 1941 to the State Board of Education in that matter was “We do not haul white and colored children in the same bus and we haven’t thought of allowing both races to attend the same school. These two things are what really are in the minds of the colored people **and their white friends who are agitating this question the most.** [Conklin Petition 1941](#)“(location LCPS Archives, Petitions Folder).
- **June 9, 1935.** Petition to retain Mamie R. Waters for the 1935/36 academic year. Source: LCPS Archives, Petitions Folder [Leesburg Petitionfor Mamie Waters](#). Note. Ms Waters was born about 1873, Source U.S. Census for 1920 and 1930 for Leesburg.

- In my opinion, the 1941 reference by the Superintendent implies quite wrongly that the African-American population would not have stood up themselves, absent white agitators, which is a false argument we also heard when the government of Virginia under the political leadership of Senator Byrd, pushed back on the Supreme Court's decision to strike down segregation. There is a difference however between 1941 and 1932. While it is fair to say that the white voters in 1932 supported the "colored" community in this particular instance, it is also important to note that the petition wasn't a request to change the social structure, so it likely can't be placed into a civil rights context.

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