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# Black Education in Alexandria: A Legacy of Triumph and Struggle

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## Part 2: Separate and Not Equal, 1870-1960

In the Spring of 1870, Alexandria held the first elections under the new constitution. This could have been an opportunity for racial and political power sharing in Alexandria, but instead, between the elections of 1870 and 1873, Conservatives took control of the city and the state. This meant two things: first that segregation would be, and stay, the bedrock upon which Virginia and Alexandria's public education system would be built and maintained; and Black schools would be starved of agency, resources and talent which would drive a slow deterioration of Alexandria's venerated institutions.

State authorities chose Richard Carne to be Alexandria's first Superintendent of Schools. He and an all-white School Board of Trustees proceeded to establish a city-wide free public school system, while Alexandria's Black educators and supporters - such as Rep. George Seaton and members of the First Free School Society - were relegated to watching.

From the early 1800s until the repression that followed retrocession, then from the early days of Union control through liberation, Black Alexandrians controlled their education. In 1870, when white authorities took over, Black Alexandrians lost their agency. Over the next century, white officials neglected Black school facilities, allowed overcrowding, underpaid staff, and denied the community a high school, over and over again, while they built multiple primary and secondary schools for white families.

During the first years of free public education in Alexandria, Black children had a cadre of experienced African American educators providing them with a higher quality education than their white peers received. Not surprisingly, Black students had better outcomes on examinations. The Black community continued to cherish education, supporting their teachers and schools. Meanwhile, white parents had to be cajoled into taking advantage of free schools, and many struggled with the idea of paying taxes for all children to learn. The dominant white culture emphasized "personal responsibility" and preferred private educational opportunities - traditional social constructs that limited who could access education.

As early as 1876, school officials stopped paying rent for the Black school buildings but promised to maintain them. By 1911, both buildings had fallen into disrepair. In 1915, the boy's school was consumed by a fire, and the girls' school was dilapidated and unsafe. Black Alexandrians, fearful of being labeled agitators, cautiously advocated for new buildings. Still, it took several years, and when the city built Parker-Gray to replace Snowden, they cut costs and educated boys and girls together. Three years after it opened, the school was overcrowded. It was another 15 years before officials agreed to build a second elementary school for Black children in Alexandria City. At that point, Black students were taking high school courses at Parker-Gray elementary school and the two all-white high schools were consolidated into a new George Washington High School on Mount Vernon Avenue. Alexandria didn't build a high school for Black citizens until 1950. When they did, it was to avoid a possible lawsuit for violating the Plessy decision's "separate but equal" doctrine.

The roots of the physical and material deterioration of these schools were white control and racial segregation. White schools received much more support from Alexandria and the students' academic and sports achievements were recognized and celebrated by the whole city. White authorities continually shorted Black children, leaving it to the Black community to find ways to shore up their schools and champion their teachers and students achievements.

Segregated schools also played a key role in the conservative white agenda. Conservative Democrats, who controlled the schools and the operation of government, used the schools to push a false narrative that culturally redeemed the South after the Civil War. The school lessons they promoted perpetuated racial hierarchy by instilling inferiority into Black children and superiority into white students.

## Alexandria Launches Free, But Separate Schools

**O**n May 25, 1870 the city held its first municipal election after being readmitted to the Union. Political power shifted back to the white establishment, putting Conservative Party members in control of the Common Council, “despite efforts by Black and white Republicans to create a permanent block in opposition.” Republicans won only in the Fourth Ward, where the majority of the population was Black, electing to Council Third Baptist Rev. George Parker who was also a Trustee of First Select Colored School. [Endnote 1]

In October, Alexandria received instructions from Richmond for the establishment of segregated grade schools. The city was directed to appoint a Board of Trustees to work with Superintendent Richard L. Carne, who was sworn in on September 27, 1870. Carne organized the city into four school districts based on Alexandria’s political wards. [Deeper Dig 1]

- First Ward became the *Snowden District*, named after Edgar Snowden Sr. “in recognition of the services rendered in the cause of public education by the editor of the *Gazette* through the columns of that journal.”
- Second Ward was called the *Custis District*, “in memory of the late G.W.P Custis [George Washington Park Custis], the constant friend of our Alexandria schools.”
- Third Ward became the *Hallowell District* “in grateful remembrance of the signal services rendered the youth of the entire South by [Benjamin Hallowell](#).”
- Fourth Ward was changed to the *Washington District* “that being the district in which the foundation for educating orphan children and the poor, was made by the Father of this Country.”

The names of Districts in Alexandria County were Jefferson, Arlington, and Washington. [Endnote 2]

Initially, officials planned to set up four schools in Alexandria City. White and Black students would be taught in separate schools as would boys and girls.

Authorities also decided to employ Black teachers at schools for Black children whenever possible and determined that Black teachers would not teach white children.

Officials planned to repurpose the two school buildings already owned by Alexandria's Black community for the education of their children.

"For colored schools, arrangements could be easily made, the trustees of the present colored school houses on Alfred and Pitt streets offering to rent them both, all their furniture for a moderate price, which, however, they had not yet named. About the accommodation of white schools there would be much difficulty; by putting another story on the Washington school house [Alexandria Academy Building] and partition it off, six good rooms would be afforded, which would suffice for that end of the city. For the Custis and Hallowell Districts, he [Carne] knew of no-good location," reported the *Alexandria Gazette* on Nov. 17, 1870.

In November, voters agreed to spend \$7,000 from local funds to educate students. After taking a census of the school-aged children in Alexandria, City Council and the Board of Trustees decided "\$4,000 would go to the white and \$3,000 to the colored schools," according to the *Alexandria Gazette*.

The December census determined the amount of educational space and the number of teachers needed to open schools citywide.

<b>December 1870</b>		
<b>Census of School Aged Children in Alexandria</b>		
<i>Results of the December Census of the students.</i>		
<b>District</b>	<b>Total White</b>	<b>Total Black</b>
<b>Snowden/Ward 1</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>Custis/Ward 2</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Hallowell/Ward 3</b>	<b>814</b>	<b>404</b>
<b>Washington/Ward 4</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>452</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,117</b>	<b>1,213</b>

In addition, parents were expected to pay a tax by April 1, 1871, as well as pay for books, slates, and chalk for their children. "Property holders are heavily taxed, and it is necessary that those who avail themselves of the benefit of the schools should pay their part promptly," wrote the *Alexandria Gazette*, on Feb. 14, 1871. This practice went on until 1923 when the Federal Bureau of Education mistakenly found out about the tax while surveying Alexandria's Schools. The Washington officials informed the city the tax was illegal.

The first all-white School Board of Trustees chose the following textbooks: McGuffey's Speller and Readers, Davie's Arithmetic, Harvey's Grammars, Maury's Geographies, Dundonian Penmanship, and the Holmes History of the United States. "These have been procured by nearly all the children, leaving very few, indeed, to be supplied at the public expense," according to the *Alexandria Gazette*. [Endnote 3]

## Black Schools

On the first of January 1871, the schools for Black children opened while the opening of white schools was delayed as officials scrambled to find buildings to host students.

Black boys went to the school George Seaton had built at 600 S. Pitt Street (by the 20th century the address was closer to 613 S. Pitt), which the white school officials renamed the Snowden School for Boys. This was an offensive name to many in the Black community, who continued to call it the Seaton School in honor of the man who advocated for, and was instrumental in, establishing the first public school system in Virginia. Edgar Snowden Sr. had been an enslaver, and as the owner-editor of the *Alexandria Gazette*, he and his sons used their positions to support the Confederate cause, the Conservative Party, lynching, and segregation. (*This paper will refer to the school as Seaton, although historically it has been referred to as the Snowden School.*) [Deeper Dig 2]

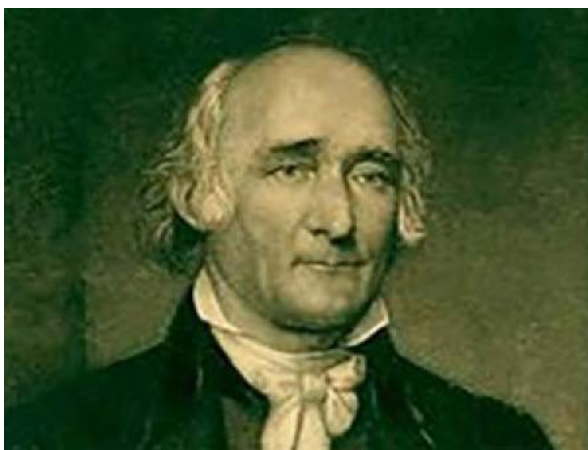


Figure of Benjamin Hallowell. Engraved by T.R. Welch (Philadelphia)

The school for Black Girls was called Hallowell. Like the boys' school, it was named after the ward where the building was located, but unlike the boys' school, the name was not offensive to Alexandria's African Americans. Benjamin Hallowell was a scientist and Quaker who fought against the enslavement of Black people. The space at the Alfred Street building needed maintenance, so when the schools first opened, Hallowell was also held at the Seaton (Snowden) School. The Hallowell School relocated after alterations were made to the schoolhouse at 400 N. Alfred Street

(by the 20th century the address was 413), which was also owned by the First Free School Society. *[Endnote 4]*

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### **First School Year:**

#### **Seaton (Snowden) School** (for Black children)

Principal Mr. Wm. F. Powell (and first grade teacher of boys)

Ms. Sarah A. Gray (second grade boys)

Ms. Harriet B. Douglass (second grade girls)

Janitor: Joseph Nicolson

#### **Hallowell School** (for Black children)

Principal Ms. Matilda A. Madden (and first grade teacher of girls)

Ms. Jane A. Crouch (second grade girls)

Carrie Claggett (second grade boys)

Janitor: John Field

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Since Alexandria's African American community had a long history of investing in the education of their children, it was not as difficult to establish their public schools. In addition, the teaching staff at the Black schools were experienced. Some teachers had run their own schools. Yet, Black principals were paid just \$50 a month, and teachers were considered "assistant teachers" and earned only \$30 a month. The janitors were paid \$10 a month. Staff were paid only when schools were in session. *[Endnote 5]*

## **White Schools**

White male children on the South end of town attended the Washington School, held in the Alexandria Academy building. The white girls from the same ward were assigned to the Custis School. One grade met in the old female free school room that adjoined the Orphan Asylum on Wolfe and Pitt Streets; the other grade attended school in the hall of the Hook and Ladder Company on S. Fairfax Street near Duke.



*The old female free school adjoined the Orphan Asylum on the corner of Wolfe and St. Asaph Streets. Photo by Office of Historic Alexandria.*

The white boys assigned to Custis School learned in two different locations - "the second floor of Harlow's new building on the Northwest corner of Royal and Cameron Streets" and in a house next to the Northeast corner of King and Columbus streets, according to the *Alexandria Gazette*, Dec. 31, 1870.

All the white schools opened by the end of January 1871.

According to the Annual Report of the City Superintendent of Schools, at the end of the first academic year, the per pupil cost for white students was 64 cents a month, while it cost 48 cents a month to educate Black children. (Usually per pupil costs are higher when there are fewer students). White teachers had been paid a total of \$2,300 and Black teachers a total of \$1,500.

## White Authorities Acquire Black Owned Schools

It did not take long for authorities to tire of paying rent to use the Black schoolhouses. During the first year of the Alexandria school calendar, in November 1871, City Council contacted Freedmen's Bureau Commissioner Gen. Oliver Otis Howard and asked him to give them the Snowden and Hallowell school buildings and their land through "cession." But the schools and real estate were owned by the Trustees of the First Free School Society and not the Freedmen's Bureau.

During the 1870s, financial difficulties hit Seaton and other leaders in the Black community. The Freedman's Bank chartered by Congress in 1865 to help newly freed people "had fallen under the control of dubious white financiers and speculators who had recklessly squandered the funds in high-risk ventures," according to *The Life and Times of George Seaton*. The Bank failed in 1873 and Congress did not make depositors whole. Black economic growth was stunted. Historians believe it was likely Seaton, who helped establish a branch of the bank in Alexandria, lost money when the bank failed. After the war, Seaton had set himself up as a grocer but continued to do carpentry work. He had been a Black man of wealth, but the depression in the early 1870s depleted him.



In January of 1876, the Trustees of the Black schools were in debt and were under investigation. Seaton was exonerated, but it is likely he could no longer keep shoring up the schools with his own money.



Figure 1 Freedman's Savings Bank in Washington, D.C., 1890. Source, U.S. Capitol Visitor's Center.

Perhaps seeing these financial setbacks as an opportunity, in March of 1876, School officials tried again to negotiate an end to rent payments for the Black schoolhouses. They promised to cover the cost of insurance for the buildings and keep them in good repair. The trustees agreed to the bargain believing the city would live up to their promise and maintain the facilities. [Endnote 6, Deeper Dig 3]

At the conclusion of the deal, on July 31, 1876, the *Alexandria Gazette* crowed, "By this agreement, about \$300 dollars a year will be saved to the city in the way of rent, for which great credit is due

to Superintendent Carne, who first opposed the further payment of rent, and with the hearty cooperation of the School Board has succeeded in reducing the school expenses to the amount named."

## White Hesitancy Toward Free Schools

Just days after the city schools opened, Superintendent Carne complained in an open letter published by the *Alexandria Gazette*, that "more than 500 white children who ought to be at school are growing up in ignorance and probably in vice." Their families were "indifferent" to education. Carne pleaded with readers to seek out reluctant parents and "persuade" them to send their children to school.

"I trust, therefore, that the philanthropic and Christian people of our city will assist me in my work, that the next [school] census may not show that one-third of the white children in Alexandria are growing up in ignorance," he stated. *[Endnote 7]*

While the Black Community generally embraced schools more eagerly than the white people, Black parents could not always afford to spare their children for the day and a third were not showing up. Carne clearly did not find this alarming as he wrote,

"I have not alluded to the colored children in this address, because the colored people have shown their appreciation of the advantages offered to them and have filled the schools opened for them within three days after they were opened. There are only 809 colored children in town of school age and of these, more than 500 - notwithstanding the poverty of their parents - are at school."

The support in the African American community for education can be measured by the number of enrolled students who showed up for classes at higher percentages than their white peers. By March 29, 1872 - one year after the free schools opened, the Seaton School (Seaton) was so oversubscribed, the Board was forced to hire Ms. Simms to teach the lower grades at a rate of \$35 a month. *[Deeper Dig 4]*

Carne's plea struck a chord with the white community and by March so many boys wanted to go to public school that they were waitlisted. Carne immediately began a campaign to fund additional educational space for white students.

But even with the bump in enthusiasm for free schools among some parents, the white community did not rally around public education the way Alexandria's Black community did. Most Virginians, Alexandrians included, remained loyal to colonial expectations that parents pay for their children's education. In 1871, at least 746 Alexandria students continued to attend private schools, the most popular being:

- St. Johns' Academy
- St. Mary's Academy
- The Alexandria Female Seminary
- Miss Eliza C. Adam's Select Boarding School
- Belle Haven Institute
- Mount Vernon Institute
- Mr. M.F. Henry's School for boys
- Miss Tebb's School for girls
- Miss Green's Boarding and Day School for young ladies.
- The Arlington Home School
- The Potomac Academy
- Misses Johnsons School for young ladies
- Miss Powell's Select School for young ladies
- Miss Belle Smith's School



Over the decades, many white people remained skeptical and resented being taxed to support the learning of other people's children - white or Black. In his 1898 annual report, School Superintendent K. Kemper (a former appointed, not elected, Conservative Mayor of Alexandria and a member of the R.E. Lee Camp) tried to address this with a halfhearted defense,

In contrast, the Black community was steadfast in their support and enthusiasm for education throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Public schools were so popular among African Americans that "parents who kept their children at home to work were generally regarded as unworthy citizens." [Endnote 9]

"The expense of maintaining the public schools has ever been a fruitful topic of discussion, and much adverse criticism; in fact, many contend that it is too costly a luxury. All, however, admit that being compelled by law to establish such a system, it ought to be carried on in such a way as to produce the best results, cost what it may." [Endnote 8]

Basically, since the government is forcing us to provide education to citizens, we should try to have respectable outcomes.

## Segregation was Key to White Support

Even though Black educators in Alexandria often had more experience and were better qualified than their white counterparts, white parents would not allow them to teach their children, nor would they allow students to learn together. It was essential to the identity of middle- and working-class white people that the racial hierarchy established during enslavement remain intact - even to the detriment of their children's learning.

When exam results were released at the end of the first full school year, in June 1872, the Superintendent praised the staff at Hallowell School where student "reading was decidedly better than that of the white schools which had [also] been examined. In arithmetic too, the work of some of the children was surprisingly rapid and in all other studies they did well, especially in spelling, in which some of the white schools have been found deficient." Veteran Black teachers Sarah A. Gray, Jane Crouch, and Harriet B. Douglass taught the girls at Hallowell at the time. [Deeper Dig 5]

Proponents of the Common Schools Philosophy would have argued that successful and struggling students together would advance the entire group. Sen. Charles Sumner (R-Mass.) was a longtime Common Schools advocate who passionately advocated for white and Black students to learn together. Segregation, he said, was "nothing but the tail of slavery." [Endnote 10]

In 1870, Sumner, who was white, introduced what he considered his most important piece of legislation - a Civil Rights Bill - written with the help of African American John Mercer Langston. The legislation guaranteed all citizens, regardless of color, "equal and impartial enjoyment of any accommodation, advantage, facility or privilege." It would end segregation in public spaces, including schools. It didn't pass, but he kept introducing it year after year.

When Sumner died in 1874, his last wish was for the bill to become law. The U.S. Senate was intent on approving it and as they debated the legislation, Alexandria's School Board discussed their fears.

Superintendent Carne said the Civil Rights legislation "will result in the instant destruction of the public schools."

Board members considered enlisting Alexandria churches to set up schools so white children could still get an education when the public system collapsed under the weight of equality.

## CONFEDERATE CAUSE AND HISTORY

Growing in strength with each election cycle, southern conservatives launched a culture war to preserve and strengthen the racial hierarchy of the past. To win the hearts and minds of the future, classrooms became battlefields and facts became myths as former confederates rewrote the historical record from enslavement through the end of the Civil War. With the help of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) their revisions made it into school textbooks and indoctrinated generations of students.

By the mid-1880s, Alexandria's confederate veterans and their families had organized into the R.E. Lee Camp and a ladies' auxiliary, a precursor to the Mary Custis Lee Chapter of the UDC. These groups decorated the landscape with memorials and flags and taught children how to remember those ancestors who had seceded from the United States, waged a war against the nation, and lost. They organized white youth into a club called the Children of the Confederacy. Alexandria's UDC launched the very first children's chapter in 1896.

The national UDC issued catechisms - a call-and-response exercise used in classroom instruction - to instill mythology into students through rote memorization. A portion of one of the turn-of-the-century catechisms states:

- **"How were the slaves treated?**  
A: With great kindness and care in nearly all cases, a cruel master being rare and lost the respect of his neighbors if he treated his slaves badly. Self-interest would have prompted good treatment if a higher feeling of humanity had not.
- **What was the feeling of the slaves towards their masters?**  
A: They were faithful and devoted and were always ready and willing to serve them.
- **How did they behave during the war?**  
A: They nobly protected and cared for the wives of soldiers in the field, and widows without protectors; though often prompted by the enemies of the South to burn and plunder the homes of their masters, they were always true and loyal.
- **What were the principles of the Southern people?**  
A: They believed that each State should regulate her own affairs, according to its best interests, with no meddling with the management of other States and that each State should loyally support the Constitution of the United States.

The UDC openly promoted a dishonest historical narrative to ensure "our Southern Cause" revisions "vindicate Southern people." By omitting an accurate history, African American children were left to learn glorified stories about their enslavers. Instead of reading about their ancestor's fight for liberty and equality, they were expected to be taught that their forefathers accepted and even enjoyed enslavement. These lessons harmed Black students, perpetuated racism, and ingrained unjust feelings of inferiority. [Endnote 11]

An earlier version of the bill gave the U.S. president power to appoint county commissioners with the authority to tax local residents and run their schools if state and local officials refused to desegregate. Concerned this would make its way back into the legislation, Carne lamented the possibility of hundreds of Northern teachers returning to Alexandria, who he assumed would “be very glad to come back and make their living out of us.” He insisted that Northern teachers would force integration upon Alexandria. If this happens, he recommended, it would be best to support nominally mixed schools in the short term to avoid bringing “great evil upon us.”

Some board members wanted to vote on a resolution detailing their opposition to mixed schools and send it with a delegation to Congress. But others reassured their colleagues that the City Council and the General Assembly would maintain segregation.

Board Member Edgar Snowden, Jr. had spoken with some Black educators who, he said, did not want mixed schools either.

The Civil Rights Act was passed only after Congress removed the stipulation to integrate public schools. President Ulysses Grant signed it into law on March 1, 1875, but he never enforced it. *[Endnote 10]*

In 1883, an all-white U.S. Supreme Court struck it down.

## The First Round in the Fight for a Black High School

When Virginia introduced the new public education system, Richmond told localities to focus on primary grades and the teaching of spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and English grammar. Alexandria students who wanted to go to high school were expected to pay for private education and/or travel to Washington, D.C., which was out-of-reach for many of the students who attended free public schools.

As early as 1871, Miss M.E. Stratton, the white principal at the Black Normal School (teacher prep) on Alfred Street - who had worked for the Freedmen's Bureau - sent a letter to the School Board offering her school as a high school that could be incorporated into Alexandria's new school system. Stratton had a number of African American students studying a secondary curriculum and funders had pledged to continue to support her high school for one year as an Alexandria City High School after which, she said, the City would take over “under such regulations as the Board might prescribe.” *[Endnote 12]*

The School Board sent Stratton's offer to the Committee on Studies and Discipline to develop a response. On July 28, 1871, the two members of the Committee wrote that after considering her recommendation with "much care" they were opposed to opening a high school for Black students for the following reasons:

"1st. That under the law and the regulations of the Board, the sexes and races must be kept separate, which would involve the establishment of four high schools, at an expense of probably eight or ten thousand dollars, or as much as the entire system costs at present; a sum the levying of which would be very burdensome to the taxpayers at this time.

2d. That from the examinations just concluded they deem it no injustice to the teachers or pupils to say that there are few, if any boys or girls attending the schools, either white or colored, who will be sufficiently advanced to need the instruction of a high school for several years to come, and that such a school seems, therefore unnecessary.

Under these circumstances, while fully appreciating the motives which prompted the liberal offer made by Miss Stratton, we cannot but think that its acceptance would entail unnecessary expenses on the city after this year and that it would be far better to build up High Schools gradually by introducing additional studies, as the pupils become prepared for them, into the existing first grade schools, the teachers of which, that are satisfied, are fully competent to fill much higher position than they at present, occupy.

John S. Beach  
Richard L. Carne  
Committee on Studies and Discipline" Alexandria Gazette.

A decade later, Richard Carne's brother William F. Carne was Superintendent and was lobbying in earnest for a high school for white students. At least one of the male students from the Washington School had matriculated into the University of Virginia. Carne used this example to illustrate the need for a secondary school for white youth.

At the same time, multiple Black students who had graduated from "Snowden" earned praise and awards from Howard University - yet the white authorities did not advocate for a high school for them.

As early as 1885, high school classes, including algebra, were being taught at Seaton (Snowden) and a small high school class started at Hallowell. Both schools had permission from the Superintendent to teach the higher-level courses.

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In 1890, Richard Carne remarked, “I had not expected much of an effort in this direction [high school coursework] in the colored schools, as Howard University absorbs most of the colored youth here who desire a higher education.”

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There were private high school options in Alexandria for Black students who could afford them. In 1884, Robert B. Robinson, the pastor of Roberts Memorial Chapel, with his son Magnus Robinson, opened a primary and trade school. For a fee, Black boys and girls were able to obtain a “primary, normal and industrial education” at the Alexandria Normal and Industrial School. It operated a broom department, printing department, a sewing school, and a cooking school.

In 1896, Robinson’s school was renamed the John Hay Industrial School and was moved into a new building bought and paid for by the Black community. [Deeper Dig 7]

The same year, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* ushered in the “separate but equal” doctrine baking racial discrimination into the nation’s school system. Ironically, it would be legal challenges to this decision that would finally convince white Alexandrians to build a high school for Black students in 1950, nearly 35 years after opening an all-white high school on Cameron Street. [Deeper Dig 8]

## Separate and Not Equal

By the turn of the century, conservative white Virginians had amassed enough power to call for a Constitutional Convention to replace the agreement they made to rejoin the United States after the war. Unlike the 1869 constitution that was written by white and Black Unionists, moderates, and Republicans, the 1902 document was developed by an all-white group of Conservative Democrat delegates. Their stated goal for holding the convention was to disenfranchise Black citizens. To do this, the new constitution required voters to pass a test displaying significant knowledge of the state’s constitution which, for white people, disincentivized investing in educating Black citizens. While the 1869 constitution continued to require the state to offer free education, the new compact specifically dictated the segregation of public schools. [Deeper Dig 9]

Bolstered by a new constitution, the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Plessy*, control of state and city governments, white Alexandria plowed forward into the new century. By 1911, they launched the coursework for a graded high school for white students at the Washington (for white boys) and Lee [formerly Custis] school (for white girls), while the two Black school buildings erected by George Seaton fell into disrepair. This happened despite the white authorities’ 1876 promise to the Black Trustees that they would maintain the buildings in exchange for no longer paying to rent them.

In Superintendent W.H. Sweeny's end-of-year report for the 1910-1911 school year, he wrote that in the Snowden (boys) and Hollowell Schools (girls), "the classrooms are in very bad condition," and he asked the School Board to repair them. They did not.

As the city prepared a suite of high school classes and fielded football and baseball teams for white students for the 1911-1912 academic year, their parents remained skeptical of public schools. In an attempt to drum up support, the *Alexandria Gazette* wrote,

"Some Alexandrians have heretofore as a rule considered the schools of Alexandria as inferior to those in Washington and other cities. They have even gone so far as to send their children to other schools. At this time there is no need of it. Alexandria can offer the same educational facilities as any other city. An attempt has been made to induce these parents to send their children to the local high school this year..."



*Hollowell School, when used as a hospital during the Civil War. (Courtesy, Alexandria Library, Special Collections, William Smith collection)*



*Figure 2 The old Alexandria High School, ca. 1917. National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress.*

The newspaper's closing argument claimed Alexandria's schools were "second to none other in the state. Furnished with the best appliances, and conducted by a corps of competent teachers, they are attended by all classes of future citizens." Notably, the *Gazette* was writing exclusively to white Alexandrians, without any reference to the state of education for Black residents. [Endnote 13]

Two years after Sweeny asked the Board to fix facilities at the Black



schools, in 1914, Henry White took over as principal at Hallowell and immediately remarked that both buildings were in serious disrepair.

A year later, white residents' doubt over a high school had been overcome and, according to an *Alexandria Gazette* report, "a large majority of people" now supported building a secondary school for white students. The cornerstone of Alexandria High School was placed at the Northwest corner of Cameron and West Streets. [Endnote 14]

While the building was under construction, on Monday, March 27, 1916, disaster struck as fire consumed the Seaton School. Students were forced to flee the building. In their reporting, the *Alexandria Gazette* referred to the Black public school children as criminals trying to avoid justice:

"The flames shot up so suddenly that the inmates had but little time in which to make their escape."

March 1916 marked *forty years* since Alexandria stopped paying rent to the Trustees with the promise to maintain the school buildings. After the fire, Seaton students were taught in St. Mary's Sunday School building on Royal and Wilkes Streets and others attended classes in a building on the west side of Washington Street between Jefferson and Green streets. [Endnote 15]

Even though one school was gone and the other was deteriorating, the fight for a new primary school building for Black children continued to

be controversial. Knowing this, Seaton (Snowden) Principal John Parker, Hallowell's Henry White, and Third Baptist Rev. S.B. Ross felt obligated to approach the Superintendent and explain that they did not want to be "considered agitators" but they wanted to advocate for a new building. Sweeney gave the men permission to fundraise, but only among their "own people." The men formed a coalition with Samuel Tucker Snr., Samuel Madden, Mrs. Blanche Parker-Taylor, Henry T. Taylor, the Teachers'



*Former location of the Seaton School on South Pitt Street. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.*

Association, and the alumni of the Hallowell and Seaton Schools who were all eager to help. [Endnote 16]

There were also members of the white community who provided backhanded support for a new Black school. At a PTA event in May 1916, Alexandria Light Infantry Capt. Johnson, said, done correctly, the city could build a school and save money. He noted, a “large brick building could be erected to house in two separate wings both sexes of colored pupils and thus less teachers would have to be employed.” [Endnote 17]



*John T. Parker, Snowden School Principal*

A year later, the *Alexandria Gazette* took the school board to task for their inaction, writing in an editorial, “the housing of colored pupils is another difficult problem. Since the destruction by fire of the Snowden building several years ago the board has been renting buildings for colored boys. Hallowell School Building for colored girls in the northern section of the city has long outlived its day of usefulness and has passed beyond the stage of repair.” [Endnote 18, *Deeper Dig 10*]



*Former location of the Hallowell School on North Alfred Street.  
Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.*

Almost two years later, on April 15, 1919, the Board of Aldermen approved \$7,500 for the lot at 901 Wythe Street. They followed Capt. Johnson’s advice and consolidated the two schools into one \$70,000 brick building. They also stopped short of providing the nine teachers with the necessities they needed to instruct the students. [Deeper Dig 11]

Fortunately, the coalition of school advocates had raised \$4,000 from their community and they used the donations to outfit the auditorium with chairs and a curtain, classrooms with waste baskets, desks, chairs, and coat racks. Wall clocks were placed in the hall and auditorium. Another \$1,000 was spent on equipment for home economics, reference books, roller maps, small globes for use in teaching geography, rubber-tipped pointers, a typewriter, a Victrola and records, a lantern slide with 600 slides, and the down payment on window shades for classrooms. [Endnote 19]

Five years after the Seaton School burned down, and nearly 10 years after Superintendent Sweeny asked the Board to fix the two Civil War era schoolhouses, the doors to a single primary school for Alexandria's Black children opened in 1920. The Black community named their one and only school Parker-Gray, after John F. Parker, former principal of the Seaton School from 1875-1915, and Sarah A. Gray, past principal of the Hallowell School from 1871-to-1881 and from 1883-to-1893.

Three years after opening, during a 1923 survey of the city's schools, the U.S. Bureau of Education found that Parker-Gray had 40 students to a class. That was too many, but local white officials ignored the federal government's recommendations, and by 1932 the small school was serving 915 pupils.

When Parker-Gray opened, Alexandria had two white public high schools: Alexandria High School and George Mason High School on Cameron Mills Road. There were still no proper public secondary options in the city for Black families. In 1932, Parker-Gray teachers decided to put together a high school class that graduated in 1936. Alexandria's African Americans continued to advocate for a secondary school and another primary school.



*Parker-Gray Graduating Class of 1936*

It was in this atmosphere, in 1933, that Thomas Chambliss (T.C.) Williams, a Conservative Democrat, became the superintendent of Alexandria Schools. Reluctant at first, Williams was eventually convinced to address the overcrowding by Black community advocates. In 1935, the city purchased an old silk factory on Wilkes Street that became Lyles-Crouch Elementary School. *[Deeper Dig 12]*

The same year, the city cut the ribbon on a brand-new Art Deco building in Del Ray that consolidated the two white high schools into George Washington High School.

Secondary students at Parker-Gray still did not have high school facilities.



*Lyles-Crouch Elementary School, in the old silk factory.  
(Alexandria Library, Special Collections)*

## The Fight to End Discrimination

While the Alexandria school system was expanding, African American leaders were laying the groundwork to restore their civil rights. In 1935, Charles Hamilton Houston, who had been Dean at Howard University Law School in Washington, D.C., became the first General Council for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). While at Howard, Houston devised a legal strategy to expose inequality and test the foundation of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. He mentored a number of young Black lawyers, including Alexandrians Samuel Tucker and Joseph Waddy. Thurgood Marshall who argued *Brown v. Board* before the U.S. Supreme Court had also been a student and mentee.

In 1939, Tucker tried to use Houston's legal strategy to integrate the newly opened "whites only" public Library on Queen Street. Tucker organized a nonviolent sit-in that was carried out by Edward Gaddis, Morris Murray, William Evans, Clarence Strange and his brother, Otto. The men were arrested and charged. But the judge dismissed the case, thwarting Tucker's plan to draw *Plessy* into question when he represented the men in court.

Over the next decade, Houston, Marshall, and the NAACP's Black lawyers targeted schools. States had a constitutional obligation to provide free education and *Plessy* required they meet the "separate but equal standard," making schools fertile ground to expose the lie that Blacks were treated equally. As the legal team racked up wins, some southern white families pulled their students from public education and enrolled them in private schools. [Endnote 20]

# The Struggle for Equal Pay

Since Alexandria established its public school system, the salaries for men were higher than women, and the leadership in white schools earned more than their Black counterparts. Despite the decades of experience Black female teachers had at the inception of the system, they were paid the same as white female teachers - \$35 a month - the equivalent of \$858.27 in 2023.

A breakdown of salaries after the first full academic year follows:

## 1872 Male Educators

The principal of the *all-white boys' school* was paid \$70 a month (\$1,716 in 2023), his Vice Principal \$60 a month (\$1,471 in 2023), his First Assistant made \$45 a month and all other teachers were paid \$35 each month.

At the Seaton School *for Black boys* the principal made \$60 a month and everyone else on staff earned \$35 a month.

## 1872 Female Educators

At the *white girls' school*, the principal made \$60 a month (\$1,471), the Vice Principal \$55 and everyone else \$35.

At the Hallowell School *for Black girls*, the principal made \$55 a month (\$1,348) and her staff earned \$35 for teaching each month.

In 1898, the average salary of white male staff was \$85 a month (\$3,063) while Black men earned an average of \$52 a month (\$1,874). The average monthly pay for white females was \$45 (\$1,622) while Black women earned \$38 (\$1,370) per month. [Endnote 21]

Two years later, at the end of the 1901 school year, the average monthly salary for white male staff was \$92, while Black men on average earned just over half of that at \$54 a month. [Endnote 22]

From 1903 to 1933, "it seemed clear that salaries for Negro teachers were still purposely below salaries for white teachers," wrote Laurel C. Dolan in "A History of Negro Education in Alexandria City Public Schools 1900-1964."

In September 1916, the Virginia Superintendent of Schools reported that African American teachers' pay across the state was a decade behind. "The average salary of white teachers has been raised 80 percent while that of the colored teachers now equals the salary drawn by white teachers in 1905." [Endnote 23]



## THE ORIGINS OF RACIALLY BIASED TESTS

With the outbreak of World War I, the Federal Government asked a group of psychologists to develop a test that could measure the IQ of soldiers to help the Army identify those with mental challenges and those who had extra smarts. Princeton University's Carl Brigham was one of the test designers; he believed that Nordic heritage rose above all other ethnicities in intelligence and aptitude.

In 1923, Brigham published "[A Study of American Intelligence](#)," using data gathered from the IQ tests, he pointed to what he believed to be a racial scoring gap as evidence of a "genetic" racial hierarchy that placed northern Europeans at the top. He was very afraid of mixing ethnicities, saying, "The decline of American intelligence will be more rapid than the decline of the intelligence of European national groups, owing to the presence here of the Negro. These are the plain, if somewhat ugly facts that our study shows. The deterioration of American intelligence is not inevitable, however, if public action can be aroused to prevent it."

Brigham's arguments helped sustain the illegal segregation of public services, [especially schools](#), by falsely elevating white European heritage over the rest.

Next, Brigham began to work with the College Board and produced the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) that was first administered in 1926. Brigham and eugenicists "believed the SAT would reveal the natural intellectual ability of white people," according to Ibram X. Kendi.

To this day, the test favors white students with means by "testing bodies of knowledge that are fundamentally white and middle class; therefore, the tests reinforce the idea that white identity is the default American identity," according to an October 2018 article "[History of the SAT is Mired in Racism and Elitism](#)," by Mariana Viera.

Not much changed during Superintendent Sweeny's tenure, but after he died in 1924, his replacement, R.C. Bowton, moved to Alexandria from a western state. African American teachers said that Bowton treated them with respect and gave them the supplies and materials they needed to teach.

In 1929, Bowton hired Wesley Elam, a graduate of Hampton Institute and Columbia University, to head up Parker-Gray. Soon after his arrival, Elam began lobbying Bowton for equal pay for his staff. The Superintendent appeared to listen to Elam and in so doing jeopardized his position in Alexandria. After losing favor in the white community, Bowton was replaced by T.C. Williams in 1933. [Endnote 24, 25]

Williams didn't have the same appreciation for Wesley Elam's arguments on behalf of the Parker-Gray staff. By the end of the 1937-1938 school year, Williams successfully forced Elam out. [Endnote 26]

In Richmond, the NAACP and Virginia Teachers Association were attacking pay inequality in the courts and winning. Their successes were noted, and in 1940, the Alexandria School Board agreed to ratchet up the salaries of Black staff over a three-year period beginning in 1941. Each year, Black educators received a third more salary until they earned the same as white staff. [Endnote 27]



# The History Wars

White control over the textbooks used in public schools gave undue influence on groups promoting a white centered history of the United States, including the revisionist and false “Lost Cause” interpretation of the more recent past. Their academic choices harmed Black students and furthered the cause of white supremacy well into modernity.

In the early 20th century, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) had moved beyond catechisms and were having success manipulating the content of classroom history books. Their interpretation of enslavement, the antebellum South, and the causes of the Civil War had become a mainstay of Southern curriculum.

UDC Historian Mildred Lewis Rutherford published a pamphlet in 1919 that provided state and local chapters with a set of rules outlining the content that should appear in school textbooks. The history was based solely on the mythical Lost Cause ideology.

The next year, she published a book titled “Truths of History,” which expanded on the first publication.

“It was a blacklist, and it had an immediate effect as state divisions launched campaigns to ban books,” according to Facing South’s “Twisted Sources” by Greg Huffman. [Endnote 28]

By distorting the facts concerning America’s racial history, these texts perpetuated a segregated and racist ideology that harmed Black children, according to Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the author, historian, and the Father of Black History Week, who published *Mis-Education of the Negro*. In his 1933 critique, Woodson indicted the textbook authors for leaving the history, sacrifice, and achievements of African Americans out of classroom books. When Blacks were mentioned, he said, they were portrayed as “menial,” “subordinate” and “sub-human.” Enslavement was even described as a positive civilizing force upon Black people.

W.E.B. Dubois, a leading Black scholar, and civil rights activist, agreed with Woodson’s argument and took it further in a 1935 article “Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?” Dubois said rampant prejudice and white-centered institutions made it impossible for African American children to get a proper education. He offered up segregation as a solution.

“Negroes must know the history of the Negro race in America, and this they will seldom get in white institutions. Their children ought to study textbooks like Brawley’s ‘Short History,’ the first edition of Woodson’s ‘Negro in Our History,’ and Cromwell, Turner, and Dykes’ ‘Readings from Negro Authors.’ Negroes who celebrate the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln, and the worthy, but colorless and relatively unimportant

founders of various Negro colleges, ought not to forget the 5th of March, that first national holiday of this country, which commemorates the martyrdom of Crispus Attucks. They ought to celebrate Negro Health Week and Negro History Week. They ought to study intelligently and from their own point of view, the slave trade, slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction, and present economic development," Dubois wrote, adding the sad statement that, as a Harvard graduate, when he arrived at Atlanta University to teach history in 1897, he had no idea African Americans had a history.

"White propaganda" has controlled civilization for a thousand years. The white narrative has been "bolstered" by a system that rewards those who participate in it with opportunity and high wages. But for Black Americans, this "state of mind" was suicidal, according to Dubois.

Woodson concurred and said the schools were "brainwashing" students. By neglecting "Afro American History" and completely distorting the truth in most history books, he said, Black children were "deprived" of their heritage and "relegated to nothingness and nobodiness." [Endnote 29]

Twenty years later, in 1957, 7th grade Lyles-Crouch teacher Carlton Funn, Sr., said he was shocked that the city schools were still teaching dated and racist history. He shared the following quote from the Virginia History, Government, and Geography textbook:

"Life among the Negroes of Virginia in slavery times was generally happy. The Negroes went about in a cheerful manner making a living for themselves and for those for whom they worked. They were not so unhappy as some Northerners thought they were, nor were they so happy as some Southerners claimed. The Negroes had their problems and their troubles. But they were not worried by the furious arguments going on between Northerners and Southerners over what should be done with them. In fact, they paid little attention to these arguments." [Endnote 30]

Funn ended up writing and teaching his own curriculum with a "full and factual account of the past," that included the contributions and achievements of Black Americans. Alexandria schools continued to use the history textbook quoted above into the 1970s.

These UDC legacy texts had a profound impact on the 20th century, according to the University of North Carolina Historian Karen L. Cox, who said the generation of children raised on the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War were the same generations that engaged in the campaign of Massive Resistance to equality in education. [Endnote 31]

## Another Round in the Fight for a High School

In the early part of the 20th century, three more white elementary schools opened in Del Ray, Rosemont, and Beverly Hills. The World Wars and New Deal brought waves of

federal workers to Alexandria. The suburbs grew, filling in Alexandria to the West and North.

The rapid growth brought new schools for white families. In 1942, Douglas MacArthur Elementary opened to serve the Seminary Road area. The following year, Charles Barrett Elementary opened on the edge of Alexandria and Arlington.

In Old Town, Lyles-Crouch and Parker-Gray elementary schools served the Black community. The high school coursework offered at the Parker-Gray primary school required 22 teachers who instructed students in core courses, plus music, French, typing, home economics and shop.

With the influx of wartime workers, Parker-Gray's enrollments surged, forcing them to build an addition in 1941 that was quickly outgrown. The staff struck a deal for classroom and cafeteria space with the nearby United Service Organization Building. Each day, students had to leave the building and walk a block down Patrick Street to get lunch and go to class.

In 1947, a report by the Alexandria Council of Social Agencies found the overcrowding at Parker-Gray extreme and "deplorable." [Endnote 32]

The Black community continued their campaign for a high school building. Williams waffled between promising one was in the works, to disingenuously blaming the war effort for making materials scarce. All the while, Williams was overseeing a significant addition to one of the all-white school buildings. [Endnote 33]

The African American community enlisted the help of NAACP's Charles Houston to increase pressure on authorities. By now, Houston had a string of courtroom successes against districts that hadn't provided equal accommodations to Black and white students.

Finally, T.C. Williams and the School Board folded.

Alexandria spent \$639,000 to build a high school for the African American community on the North end of town. Located on Madison Street, the building had 10 classrooms, a music room, a gymnasium (with folding bleachers), a clinic, woodworking, and brick masonry shops, drafting, auto mechanic and metal works shops, a library with a 5,000 book "capacity," and a cafeteria that could seat 256 students. [Endnotes 34, 35]

The *Evening Star* wrote:

"The second floor suite looks like a Williamsburg interior with a corner cupboard filled with China, drop-leaf tables, and graceful living room furniture. It is part of the schools' home economics set up that includes a kitchen, home workshop and a complete sewing room."

The students would learn the same curriculum that was taught at the all-white George Washington High School.

Black Alexandrians renamed the former Parker-Gray grade school in honor of Charles Houston, who died on April 22, 1950. This freed up the beloved Parker-Gray name for their new secondary school that opened on Madison Street on May 31, 1950.

The newspapers billed the new high school as “satisfactory for any race,” and T.C. Williams proclaimed, “Everyone was highly pleased.”

Six years later, the city invested \$2 million on a second all-white high school for the fast-growing West End. Francis C. Hammond opened with 1200 students in attendance. This new school had 53 rooms and 6,000 new books *“in the library.”* [Endnote 36]

By 1960, the city was running eight primary schools and two high schools for white students. Black Alexandrians had just two primary schools and one high school for their children. White authorities remained in complete control of school operations, funding, and resources.

## Endnotes

1. Quote from Miller found in *The Life and Times of George Lewis Seaton*, by Peter Bernstein, Alexandria Archaeology Publication No. 121, p. 28; Election Results from *Alexandria Gazette*, "Election Results," May 27, p.3; and Reverend George W. Parker reference was from: "The Other Alexandria," blog by Char Bah, Jan. 11, 2015.
2. Establishment of School Infrastructure, *Alexandria Gazette*, Oct. 10, 1870, p.3; Oct. 22, 1870, p.3.
3. In addition to the *Gazette*, information on school books came from the "Alexandria School Board Minutes 1871-1876, Scrap Book," Box 240-13. Alexandria Library Special Collections.
4. From time to time, the press refers to the Hallowell School for Black girls as the Lee School. Later, the all white Custis School became the Lee School for white girls. Also, the press refers to what was the First Free School Society as the Colored School House Association. The First Free School Society (FFSS) was set up after the Civil War, headed by George Seaton. The group owned the land and the two Black school buildings built by Seaton. Information from: Alexandria Court, Deed Book Y3: 110; U.S. Department of Education 1870:291 and Deed Book A:81. It could be that after the city established free public schools the FFSS became the Colored Public School Building Association, which Seaton also presided over, according to the *Encyclopedia of Virginia*.
5. "It was finally decided to pay the higher teachers \$550 and the lower \$350." This would be \$55 a month and \$35 a month for white teachers only. They decided not to set the salaries for the Black Schools until later. When they did, they paid the principals \$50 a month and the teachers \$30. *Alexandria Gazette*, Nov. 17, 1870.
6. "First Ward Radicals," *Alexandria Gazette*, Nov. 1, p.3; and "City Council," Nov. 15, 1871, p.3; *The Life and Times of George Seaton*, p. 31; "Colored School Buildings," *Alexandria Gazette*, July. 31, 1876, p.3.
7. *Alexandria Gazette*, Jan. 10, 1871, p. 3.
8. "Alexandria School Board Minutes 1871-1876," Scrap Book, Box 240-13, Alexandria Library Special Collections, Alexandria, Virginia, pp. 129-130.
9. "Parents who kept their children at home to work were generally regarded as unworthy citizens." *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia*, by Alrutheus Ambush Taylor.
10. Quotes from Sen. Sumner in this section from *Congressional Globe*, May 13, 1864, p.2246; Sumner to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Feb. 25, 1872, in Edward Lillie Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner, 1860-1874* (Boston, 1894), p. 502. Debate in School Board meeting: *Alexandria Gazette*, May 30, 1874, p. 2; and "The Enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1875," by John Hope Franklin, *Prologue Magazine*, Winter 1974, p. 225-235.
11. United Daughters of the Confederacy Resolution, April 18, 1896; *UDC Catechism of Children (1904)*, *Encyclopedia of Virginia* pp.12-16; and *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* [Vol. 38, No. 4 \(Fall, 2008\)](#) pp. 408-432 (25 pages) Published By: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.
12. "Alexandria School Board Minutes 1871-1876," Scrap Book, Box 240-13, Alexandria Library Special Collections; Freedmen's Bureau Records on Ancestry.com.
13. *Alexandria Gazette*, Aug. 26, 1911.
14. *Alexandria Gazette*, July 8, 1915.
15. *Alexandria Gazette*, Apr. 8, 1916.
16. Interview with Mrs. Emma White Johnson, July 13, 1969, by Laura C. Dolan, *A History of Negro Education in Alexandria City Public Schools 1900 -1964*, published in 1969, p.18; and Parker Gray Brochure, at Parker-Gray Archives at the Alexandria Black History Museum. "From Slavery to Principal," *The Other Alexandria*, March 14, 2019: John F. Parker resigned from the principalship in 1915 due to an illness. However, Dolan's research said he was one of those who started the campaign for a new school. Perhaps he supported the campaign until he could no longer do so.
17. *Alexandria Gazette*, May 10, 1916, p. 2.
18. *Alexandria Gazette*, Oct. 10, 1917, p.2.
19. Dolan; and Parker-Gray Brochure at the Parker-Gray Archives at the Alexandria Black History Museum.

20. *Building the Federal School House, Localism and the American Education State*, Reed, Douglas, 2014.
21. "Estimated Cost for supporting Public Free School of the City of Alexandria," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 10, 1871, p. 3; *Alexandria Gazette*, March 29, 1872, p. 3; Table No. 10, Superintendent Report, Annual Statement of the Finances of the City of Alexandria, VA with Department Reports for the fiscal year ending May 31, 1898.
22. Table No. 10, Superintendent Report, Annual Statement of the Finances of the City of Alexandria, VA with Department Reports for the fiscal year ending May 31, 1898; and *A History of Negro Education in Alexandria City Public Schools 1900 -1964*, Laurel C. Dolan, 1969.
23. *Alexandria Gazette*, Sept. 6, 1916.
24. Dolan, p. 29, 30.
25. Ibid, p. 36.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid, p.44.
28. "Twisted Sources: How Confederate Propaganda Ended up in the South's School Books," *Facing South*, April 2019.
29. Introduction of "Mis-Education," by Carter Godwin Woodson, Introduction by Charles H. Wesley, and Thelma D. Perry, first published in 1933, republished on *History is a Weapon* webpage.
30. Alexandria Living Legends, Carlton Funn, Sr., published online; "1957 Textbook Fake News," By Sarah Becker, published by the *Old Town Crier*, Sept. 1, 2019.
31. "United Daughters of the Confederacy," Encyclopedia Virginia, online.
32. Dolan, p. 35.
33. Ibid.
34. "Caught Between Two Systems (Desegregating Alexandria's Schools, 1954-1973), Mable T. Lyles, p.17.
35. "New Alexandria Negro School," by John M. Kauffmann, *The Evening Star*, Sept. 4, 1950, p.2.
36. "[The Birth of Francis C. Hammond High School](#)," *Alexandria Times*, Feb. 5, 2008, reprint of Linda Johnson's article that was originally published in the Hammond School newspaper on Jan. 19, 1958. The all-white school was named after Hammond, who was a graduate of George Washington High School and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.
37. *The Life and Times of George Lewis Seaton*, by Peter Bernstein, p.59.
38. "Alexandria School Board Minutes 1871-1876," ScrapBook, Box 240-13, Alexandria Library Special Collections.



## Deeper Dig

1. When appointed to be Superintendent of Education for Alexandria City and County Richard Carne headed up St. Johns Academy, an old established private school for white children.
2. George Seaton, a Free Black before the War, was elected to represent Alexandria in the legislature in 1869. He sat on the Committee of Schools and Colleges. In 1870, the General Assembly approved a bill from his committee that created the state's first public school system. In the name of equal rights, he and other African American legislators tried to strike out a requirement that schools be racially segregated that had been added by white lawmakers. While they failed, he was one of the leaders responsible for the first public education system in Virginia. Seaton was a supporter of Alexandria schools throughout his life. He instigated the First Free School Society that bought land and established two Black schoolhouses, and he was a trustee and president of the Colored Public School Building Association. Read more: [George Seaton](#), MLK Commission; The Sanborn Insurance Maps label the building as the Seaton School and not Snowden.
3. The conservatives in control of Alexandria City Council and the School Board from 1871 onward tried to obtain the real estate and Black school buildings. "Seaton, who placed great value on education, expressed concern over segregationist efforts to deny schooling to black children. At a meeting of the First Ward Radicals on Oct. 20, 1872, there was a discussion about attempts by the conservative dominated Alexandria City Council to persuade General Howard to turn black school buildings over to the city. Seaton's brother John Andrew Seaton warned that the city "was a drift to deprive colored children of their education." Chairman George Seaton clarified that colored schools belonged to the colored people, not to General Otis Howard." *Alexandria Gazette*, Oct. 20, 1872. The City initially paid rent to the Trustees for use of the Black schools, but they negotiated a cut-off in March 1876. "The clerk will inform the Board of Trustees of Lee and Seaton School Houses that after the close of the present school season, no rents will be paid for these buildings," according to Alexandria School Board Minutes 1871-1876, Scrap Book, Box 240-13, Alexandria Library Special Collections. Over the 1870s, the board of the Colored School Association (as referred to in the *Gazette*) became indebted - \$1,200 or more. It seems Seaton sorted out the debt but was accused of swindling the people. An investigation ensued and in January 1876 he was exonerated. In addition, the association paid Seaton what was owed to him out of the treasury, and the paper reported that "Trustees Bryant and Perpender had skimmed money off the top of lumber purchases and wages," according to the *Alexandria Gazette*, Jan. 17, 1876, p.1 and Jan. 25, 1876, p.3. The First Free School Society was referred to as The Colored School House Association in the press. In July 1899, the First Free School Society of Alexandria's sole surviving members were Clem Robinson and Anthony Perpener. They deeded the schools and land on Alfred Street to Washington N. Jackson, Freeman H.M. Murray, Robert W. Bentley, James W. Lumpkins, James M. Buckner, Sharack Jackson, John Scroggins, Zachariah Tate, Richard Brooks, James Ross, Gustavas A. Lumpkins, Emanuel J. Webster and Edward H. Hill, Jr. of Alexandria City. "They were authorized to convey said real estate unto the party of the third part upon the trusts hereinafter declared, with limitation over to the parties of the second part, as successors to the trusteeship heretofore vested in said parties of the first part, all of which will at large appear by reference to their resolution adopted by said society on the 28th Day of June 1899." *The life and Times of George Lewis Seaton*, by Peter Bernstein, Alexandria Archaeology Publication Number 121.
4. Ninety-six percent of the African American boys and 88 percent of the girls enrolled showed up for classes. Only 87 percent of white boys and 79 percent of white girls who were enrolled attended classes regularly.
5. Teaching staff at the time was confirmed in *The Life and Times of George Lewis Seaton*, by Peter Bernstein, p. 59.
6. Industrial Education was advocated by Booker T. Washington who believed that the trades that Blacks had learned during enslavement were lost as the older generations were dying out. It was believed by some that education in a trade, such as carpentry, may be of better use to some African Americans especially if it was taught along with literature and the other subjects,

according to the *Evening Star*, February 12, 1897. For more, see: "Industrial Education for the Negro," Booker T. Washington, 1903.

7. John Hay was the author of a famous biography about Abraham Lincoln. There was a debate in the African American community between industrial education and liberal arts schools. [W.E.B. Dubois was an advocate of liberal arts in his endeavor to create the 'talented tenth'](#), "believing that full citizenship and equal rights for African Americans would be brought about through the efforts of an intellectual elite; for this reason, he was an advocate of a broad liberal arts education at the college level. This was in direct opposition to Washington's emphasis on industrial education."
8. Many in the Black community couldn't afford to leave Alexandria and/or pay for school, so teachers continued to provide high school level courses for these students well into the next century, according to oral interviews conducted in the late 1960s by Laurel C. Dolan available at Alexandria Library Special Collections.
9. The 1902 Constitution was never brought to a vote because it was feared people wouldn't vote to disenfranchise themselves. Instead, the Virginia Supreme Court imposed it on the citizens and declared it valid as of July 10, 1902.
10. This was the second time the *Gazette* tried to rally support for new school buildings for the Black community. On July 6, 1917, the *Gazette* published a front-page editorial in an attempt to goad School Board members into action emphasizing problems with the Civil War era school buildings and reminding the Board they were legally responsible to ensure students had suitable and safe learning spaces. Board members agreed that Hallowell was beyond repair and that a new primary school was needed.
11. Henry T. White was teacher-principal, and the nine other teachers were: Miss Laura M. Dorsey; Mrs. Susie P. Madden; Mrs. Margaret T. Young; Mrs. Sarah D. Gray (Sarah A. Gray died on Jan. 8, 1893); Mrs. Harriet Thornton; Miss Florence Murray; Mr. James E. Howard; Mr. Rozier D. Lyles; and Mrs. Mamie E. Anderson.
12. Williams would end up overseeing an immense expansion of the white public schools as government agencies, the military, and businesses supporting the New Deal and World War II drew newcomers to Alexandria. By the time he retired in 1963, Williams was the longest-serving Superintendent in Alexandria's history, according to *Building the Federal School House*, By Douglass Reed.

*Researched and written by Tiffany D. Pache for the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project.*

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