

150 Years of Tenacity and Dedication

The Jefferson School Celebrates its Sesquicentennial

COMPILED BY ANDREA DOUGLAS



The legacy of the Jefferson School is a remarkable one. As a cornerstone for African American citizens of Charlottesville and surrounding Albemarle County, the Jefferson School is a focal point for their emergence as a dynamic and vital part of the community's social history during the 20th century. It represents a spirit of tenacity and dedication to the highest national ideals of equality and fairness. This year, the Jefferson School Foundation and the Jefferson School City Center resident partners celebrate the 150th anniversary of the opening of the original school.

The Jefferson School first opened its doors in October 1865, just six months after the end of the Civil War. The New England Freedmen's Aid Society sent a teacher, Anna Gardner, to Charlottesville to open a school for former slaves. She named the school "Jefferson School" after the nation's third president, Thomas Jefferson, whom she admired. In October 1865, the first Jefferson School was established in a single room in the Delevan Hotel on West Main Street, a space that had previously served as a hospital for wounded Confederate soldiers. In 1869, the school grew to three grades and moved to a building near the Charlottesville train station. Finally, in 1894, the school was moved to the corner of Fourth and Commerce Streets (now part of the school's current parking lot). In 1924, community members and concerned parents petitioned the Charlottesville City School Board for a high school for African American students, and, in 1926, Jefferson High School became one of only ten African American high

schools in Virginia. Throughout the 1930s and 1950s, the school building underwent expansions, including the addition of the Carver Recreation Center, and shifts in purpose as the student demographic outgrew the space.

As a result of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Virginia Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr. took a resistance standpoint to integration legislation and closed two local schools, Venable Elementary and Lane High, to avoid integrating. However, as the schools were closed and other schools became overcrowded, it was clear that this strategy was faulty. In 1965, Jefferson School became an integrated junior high school, in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The school served as a flagship location for bringing about integration in Charlottesville after a massive resistance movement that occurred after the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Due to an equally headstrong effort on the part of Civil Rights activists, African American students and parents, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Charlottesville schools were eventually desegregated, with the Jefferson School being one of the first integrated educational facilities. As Kenneth Martin, Jefferson School

alumnus and desegregationist, said of the school's role in the community in comparison with other school buildings in Charlottesville, "Architecturally, it's not comparable to Venable, Clark, or McGuffey...It's what went on in the building, not just the building itself."

Conveniently situated between the University of Virginia and Charlottesville's Downtown Mall, this historic landmark is a bridge between the collegiate community and the greater Charlottesville-Albemarle area and is a part of the revitalization of the Starr Hill neighborhood. The school and neighborhood fit into a long, deeply rooted African American cultural tradition in Charlottesville. From Monticello's Mulberry Row to the UVA's architectural masterpieces, the African American community has had a great impact on the region. The Jefferson School City Center is a dynamic structure honoring and building upon the school's history as the premier educational and social center for generations.

One of the prominent features of the City Center is the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, whose mission is "to honor and preserve the rich heritage and legacy of the African American community of Charlottesville-Albemarle, Virginia." The Jefferson School African American Heritage Center offers a site in the heart of Charlottesville where African American traditions and history are available for educational and entertainment purposes. The permanent, interactive exhibit *Pride Overcomes Prejudice* describes the role of the Jefferson School in the development of public educational equality for all in Virginia and throughout the nation. In addition, the Jefferson

Images courtesy of The Jefferson School African American Heritage Center and The Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at The University Of Virginia Library, Holsinger Studio Collection

A School Song.

Names of Scholars Belonging to the Normal Class of the Jefferson School Put in Rhyme.

Charlottesville, Va., May 17th, 1876.

There's Wm. Gilmer, tall and slim,
With bearing dignified;
And Nicholas Rickman studying
His lessons by his side.
Next Burrill Gaines, the smiles of all
With such a comic look,
And Wm. Jackson who will learn
If he but touch the book.

CHORUS.

Oh! the new school house,
How dear it is to all!
We love it! Yes we love it!
Each nook and pictured wall.

Then Harriet Waynes who's sure to
Her lessons in their turn— [know
Whatever other folks may do,
She comes to school to learn.
C. Brookins next as he looms up
Behind the other scholars—
Is known for being generous
In giving dimes and dollars.

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

Then Reuben Farrar, tall and straight,
And Henry Cash are next,
And Tilly Sellers whose fine face,
Is in a ring—perplexed,
There's Margaret Hailstock words can—
Express her need of praise, [not
So lovely and complete is she
In mind and all her ways.

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

See Bella Gibbons like a flash
Her ideas come and go—
And Mary Morton whose fine eyes
Beneath their dark brows glow.
Amanda too whose brilliant mind
In a dark form is set—
Impersonating Africa,
A diamond in jet.

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

Miss Julia French comes next in turn,
A noble hearted girl—
Beloved by every one in school
Of worth a priceless pearl.
Next Nancy, Anna, both so prompt
In reaching school in time;
Which of the two is earliest,
I cannot tell in rhyme.

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

Though Nancy lives three miles away,
She's always in her seat,
An hour before the bell is rung
For scholars all to meet.
There's Harriet Sammons good and true
Refined in every thought,
And Mary Sellers who will do
At all times what she ought.

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

The muse of grace has favored her,
With ways that win the heart—
And all through life no one can doubt

That she'll act well her part.
In front of them is Sarah Cole,
As graceful as a fawn;
And Eliza R.
As e'er or

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

There's Florence Jackson so retired
Her virtues are not known,
Such fragrant bloom of character
Is loveliest when full blown;
There's Wm. Watson's vacant seat,
Pity he's not in school—
He was so apt and a good boy,
Obeying every rule.

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

Lizzie Buchanan, who can find
A better girl than she,
Her brother Charles too is a gem,
And Albert you may see,
He has a tall and manly form.
Scott Chillis sits behind,
A greater favorite with the boys
Than Scott you cannot find.

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

There's is Jefferson Kenny who is named
For an illustrious man,
Watch him for clearness of the brains
And quickness if you can.
There are two Williams yet who names
Have not been put in song.
They are Brown and Foster both good
And seldom do what's wrong. [boys

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

John Brown comes next upon the list,
An active boy is he,
And every feature of his face
Bespeaks his honesty.
J. Sellers and James Anderson
Are sitting close at hand,
They both have intellectual heads—
So quick to understand.

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

There's Joseph Dawson, he improves
In gentlemanly ways,
And for such progress he deserves
The meed of generous praise.
Ambition sets her signet clear
On Egbert Terry's brow
And fame may place a laurel there
If he'll press on as now.

CHO.—Oh! the new school house, etc.

We're pupils of the Normal School,
All aiming for the prize;
The tempting, guerdon knowledge
So high before our eyes. [holds

CHORUS.

We loved our school before,
We love it more and more,
We sing and play in the evening gay
When all our tasks are over.

School African American Heritage Center showcases a genealogy center, to offer local residents the chance to see how their individual family histories connect to the nation's and region's larger African American narrative. There are myriad opportunities for the community, including exhibitions, lectures, films, performances, and classes.

The City Center also houses the newly renovated Carver Recreation Center, offering a rich array of recreational, health and fitness related activities for citizens in the community. Several other tenants offer a range of educational, social, health and recreational services for the community. In keeping with the spirit for which the building was established, the City Center is currently home to the Piedmont YMCA, a branch of Piedmont Virginia Community College, and Literacy Volunteers, as well as the Jefferson Area Board for Aging's Mary Williams Community Center, Common Ground Healing Arts, Martha Jefferson Hospital's Starr Hill Center, and the Women's Initiative. All partners focus on providing integrated, affordable services for everyone who comes through the doors of the Jefferson City Center.

With 150 years of history, the Jefferson School gives the community the chance to continue a legacy of culture and traditions in a way that is both productive and reflective. To celebrate this milestone, the Jefferson City Center will present a Gala on October 3, the school's actual opening day in 1865. For more information, visit www.jeffschoolfoundation.org.

African American Heritage Trails

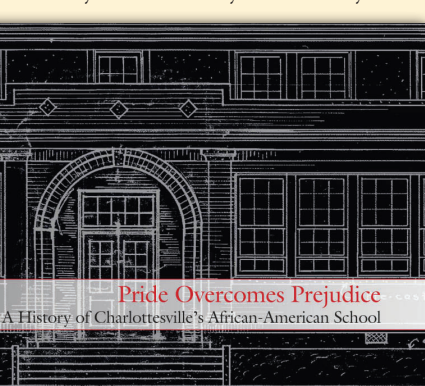
Even as places such as the University of Virginia, Monticello and Montpelier work to articulate the full scope of their histories to include the narratives of enslaved people, the larger story of African Americans in our region remains relatively unknown. Beginning with the Starr Hill and Union Ridge communities, the new heritage trail imparts a broader understanding of the lives of enslaved peoples, free blacks and emancipated people by demonstrating the full scope of communal life in our region. The walking tour highlights commercial, educational, recreational, and religious sites and provides a portrait of land ownership, political and civil rights activities and burial practices.

The first iteration of the walking tour will be available from the Heritage Center and other local sites in early fall.

Pride Overcomes Prejudice

Books and Permanent Exhibition

Pride Overcomes Prejudice, the companion to the permanent exhibition of the same title, was edited by Dr. Andrea Douglas, Jefferson School African-American Heritage Center executive director. The catalogue chronicles the school's rich history in four essays written by Scot French, exhibition advisor and associate professor of history at the University of Central Florida, Paul Gaston professor emeritus, Corcoran Department of History, UVA, Patrice Grimes, associate professor in the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education, and Lauranett Lee, curator of African American History at the Virginia Historical Society. The historical arc described by these authors reveals the resilience and resolve of Charlottesville's African American community to pursue education despite diminishing numbers, loss of property and legislation that controlled their inhabitation of public spaces. What is clear from these essays is that African Americans were deeply engaged in the political process that determined access to education from Reconstruction to the end of the 20th century. In the case of Charlottesville, their efforts meant pushing back against a system where separate was anything but equal.



Vinegar Hill: Life in the Neighborhood is the second catalogue published by the Heritage Center. Gundars Osvalds has do-

150th Anniversary Gala Celebration and an Education Conference Sessions

150th Anniversary Gala • October 3, 2015 6:30pm

The Gala will feature guest speaker Dr. Julianne Malveaux. A committed activist and civic leader, Dr. Malveaux is President Emerita of Bennett College for Women. She is an economist, author and commentator. For the last 5 years Dr. Malveaux has focused her efforts on public speaking appearances and her work as a broadcast and print/journalist and author.

The evening of celebration acknowledges the legacy of the Jefferson School in our community and celebrates the opening of the first phase of the exhibition *Pride Overcomes Prejudice*. Proceeds from the event go to support the Jefferson School Foundation Capital Campaign and aid in the completion of the permanent exhibition.

nated the collection of images to the Jefferson School Foundation and they will be reinstalled on the lower level this fall. These images, along with the commissioned Vinegar Hill monument by the world renowned artist Melvin Edwards, honor the once thriving community.

Both of these books are available for purchase at www.jeffschoolheritagecenter.org.

Permanent Exhibition

The exhibit *Pride Overcomes Prejudice*, is drawn from the oral and written histories of African Americans who participated in local, regional, and national struggles for racial equality as students, teachers, and alumni of Jefferson School, ca. 1865–1965 and beyond. Their memories, painstakingly recorded for each period of the school's history, infuse the historic Jefferson School campus and surrounding cultural landscape with meaning and significance and provides a unique, intergenerational perspective that is largely missing from other Civil Rights/School Desegregation historic sites.

The permanent exhibit will be divided into sections, each corresponding to a distinctive era—or “generation”—in the school's history, and each strategically placed within a walking tour of the historic building and grounds.

The Freedom Generation (1865–1895)

The Migration Generation (1895–1926)

The Community School Generation (1926–1939)

The Civil Rights/Massive Resistance Generation (1939–1959)

The Desegregation Generation (1959–1970)

EDUCATION CONFERENCE

From Emancipation to Post-Racial, 150 Years of African American Education, October 22–24

The conference begins on Thursday, October 22, with a keynote and participant reception. For information and complete schedule, please visit www.jeffschoolheritagecenter.org.

SESSION 1

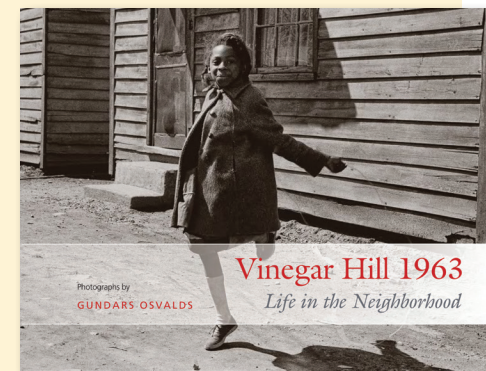
Friday, October 23, 9am–12pm, addresses the historic origins of the Jefferson School as a Freedman's school in particular, and the origins of public education in the late 19th century more generally.

SESSION 2

Friday, October 23, 1–4pm will consider the contemporary state of African American education.

SESSION 3

Saturday, October 24, 9am–12pm, will consider the role of community-based organizations in providing support to public education.



Uncovering the History of a Community

This summer, the African American Heritage Center received this 1876 copy of the Jefferson School Song from a local donor. Documents like this one, found in the attics and personal papers of alumni, reveal the history of the school and the community. In 1875, Philena Carkin, a Massachusetts school-teacher under the auspices of the American Freedmen's Aid Commission, left Jefferson to return North, leaving the school to be governed by its African American teachers. How students and teachers fared is made more clear as evidenced by this page. While some of those named are known—Bella Gibbons, the daughter of William and Isabella Gibbons, for instance—others will have to be researched.