

Haymarket High School, *Fondly* Remembered

By John T. Toler



Students at Haymarket High School on Fayette Street posed for this photo about 1914. Emma Peters (third from left, between two other girls) is the only student identified. Courtesy of Millpark.org.

If a person were to search for “Haymarket High School” on the Internet, a number of links would appear leading to information about Battlefield High School, located off U.S. 15 north of Haymarket.

This makes sense.

Opened in 2004 on an 80-acre campus, the 276,000 sq. ft. state-of-the-art Battlefield High School facility has a student body of 2,900 students in grades 9-12, taught and administered by a staff of 250. The school has built a reputation of academic excellence, as well as highly competitive sports teams. It is Haymarket’s high school.

But in the past, a “Haymarket High School” actually existed; in fact, there were two early schools that held that distinction. But changes in population and demographics in the areas served by these schools resulted in different educational requirements over

the years, as they do now.

The first school in the village was a combination school and town hall in the frame building on Washington Street that was once the town hall, and now houses the Haymarket Museum. It first started in 1883, when a group of local citizens petitioned the Prince William County School Board to provide a school in Haymarket.

The School Board agreed, but the town would have to build the schoolhouse and pay half of the teacher’s salary “...until the School Board should feel justified in assuming the paying of the whole salary,” according to the minutes of the Sept. 1, 1883 School Board meeting. As part of the agreement, the School Board would also provide \$150 worth of furniture.

The local commission went to work and raised the money needed to build the schoolhouse and pay their part of the teacher’s salary. The combination town hall and school was built in 1884

by Will Shirley, on land at the corner of Washington and Fayette streets donated to the town by Thomas Smith, John Reid and Eppa Hunton. The school rented its space from the town, an arrangement that would last for the next 26 years.

Haymarket High School

In September 1909, the School Board purchased a lot on the north end of Fayette Street from Franz Peters, and began construction of a new schoolhouse, which opened in 1910. It was originally a two-room frame building, with "one room up and one down," that cost \$2,500, according to Lucy Walsh Phinney in *Yesterday's Schools*. "In the beginning, only the lower room was used as a classroom, and one teacher taught grades 1-7," wrote Mrs. Phinney.

Increased enrollment – reported to be 45 students, with 30 in regular attendance – resulted in the upstairs room being used, and an assistant teacher hired. By the 1905-06 school year, it was necessary to add two more classrooms to the school and hire a janitor to maintain the building. In 1907, the old wood burning stoves were replaced by coal stoves that heated the four classrooms. The Peters family owned open property west of the school, which they permitted the school to use as an athletic field.

The next big change came in 1920. The need to offer high school grades for students in Haymarket-Gainesville resulted in four more rooms added to the schoolhouse. It was known as the Haymarket High School, although both elementary and secondary classes were taught there. Students from Catharpin, Hickory Grove, Gainesville, Groveton and Buckland also attended the school.

The first principal of Haymarket High School was H.M. Pearson, who later became an administrator in the Fauquier County Public School system. The size of the faculty increased, and some of the teachers boarded at the Garrett house (now "Details for the Home") on Jefferson Street, which backed-up to the school.

"The exterior of the building was wood siding with a metal roof and a cupola," wrote Mrs. Phinney. "In addition to the eight classrooms, there was a basement laboratory, but no auditorium

and no gymnasium." The building had electricity for lighting, but there was no indoor plumbing; a pump outside in the schoolyard provided water, and the bathrooms were outdoor privies.

As the population in Western Prince William County grew, overcrowding became an issue, and as early as 1928, a bond issue to build a new high school was on the ballot, but failed.

During the 1933-34 school year – with enrollment at 193 students – School Superintendent Richard C. Haydon described

the combination elementary/high school as "inadequate," and "lacking in modern equipment." In February 1934, the School Board resolved to build a new facility, but at the time, the U.S. was suffering through the Great Depression. While funding for a new high school was sought, overcrowding worsened and the old town hall was used in 1935 to house the overflow of students.

Gainesville Elementary School

A two-acre site on John Marshall Highway northeast of Haymarket was purchased from W. M. Jordan, and bids were sought to build a new school. Carolyn Wyrsh of Haymarket compiled a history of the school for its 50th anniversary in 1985, and wrote, "Initially, the grant from the Public Works Administration and the loan from the Literary Fund of Virginia were promised for the purpose

of the construction of a two-story, seven classroom and auditorium-gymnasium school building."

Unfortunately, the first bids were at least \$5,000 over the projected cost, and the plans had to be changed, resulting in a smaller building with four classrooms and a combination auditorium/gymnasium. Winning bidder for the project at \$38,888 was the J. H. Bennett Co. of Richmond. The contract was approved on May 29, 1935, and work started immediately. "Local labor was hired to speed the construction over the warm summer of 1935," wrote Mrs. Wyrsh in 1985. "Working at such low Depression wages as 10 cents an hour, there are local residents today that can point with pride to the end product of their labor."



Originally built in 1884 as a combination town hall/schoolhouse, this building on Washington Street now houses the Haymarket Museum.

The new school opened on Dec. 16, 1935 with the first through fourth grade classes housed in the new building. Grades five through seven remained at the old facility with the high school students.

The principal of the Haymarket High School served as principal of both schools, and a head teacher oversaw the daily activities at the new school. Students of both schools used the auditorium-gymnasium at the new school for assemblies, sports events and graduation.

Again, changing demographics dictated how the facilities would be utilized. "While originally intended to be a new high school for Haymarket, it was felt because of the increasing number of elementary age students, the new building would be best utilized as an elementary school," wrote Mrs. Wyrsh.

At the end of the 1941 school year, Haymarket High School effectively ceased to exist when the high school students were transferred to Osbourn High School in Manassas, and the building reconfigured for the lower grades.

The reason given by the School Board was that there weren't enough high school students to justify a separate school in Haymarket, a claim Mrs. Louise Lightner Jamison, a member of the Class of '41 and a former teacher, disputes to this day. "Nokesville didn't have any more students than Haymarket, but they got to keep their high school," she recalled.

Taking the high school out of Haymarket had a very negative impact on the town. "Gone were the ball teams that gave Haymarket an identity, gone were the commencement exercises, school plays and other activities associated with the high school," wrote Sarah M. Turner in *Haymarket: A Town in Transition*.

The old Haymarket High School building continued to be

used for the lower grades through the 1946-47 school year. In November 1947, James R. Gossom purchased the old school for \$5,000 at an auction held by the School Board. It was subsequently divided into apartments, and later destroyed by fire. An empty lot remains where the school once stood.

Growth and Change

In the meantime, student enrollment at the Gainesville Elementary School was growing. In 1946, a substantial construction project added four classrooms, a clinic/office, library, and a kitchen and cafeteria. "Prior to the addition of the kitchen, students would bring their own lunch, or partake of the soup-kitchen style lunch made in the corridor alongside the stage," wrote Mrs. Wyrsh.

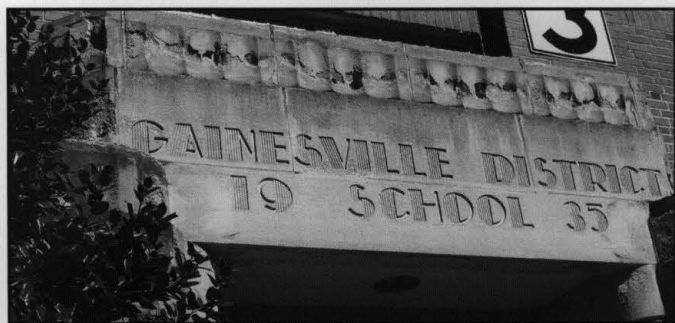
A second expansion took place in 1954, adding four more classrooms and a vestibule on the west wing of the building. In 1963, five more classrooms were added, and later in the 1960s, the cafeteria was expanded.

With the school desegregation ordered by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the "freedom of choice" practice was no longer allowed. In order to accomplish complete integration by 1966, the School Board annexed the formerly all-black Antioch-McCrae Elementary School built in 1953 at Thoroughfare to Gainesville. Then, all Gainesville District kindergarten and first grade students were assigned to Antioch-McCrae before transitioning to Gainesville Elementary.

The George G. Tyler Elementary School opened in 1968 on John Marshall Highway between Haymarket and Gainesville, and took in the sixth grade students in order to ease overcrowding at Gainesville Elementary. Like the unrealized plan to use the 1935 Gainesville school as a high school, the 1973 plan to convert Tyler to a middle school never materialized – again, due to changing demographics. The area needed another elementary school, and this time it was Tyler.

"If students lived on the west side of U.S. 15, Broad Run and Bull Run Mountain, they went to Antioch for the first two years, and then on to Gainesville Elementary," according to

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Located on Rt. 55 east of Haymarket, Gainesville Elementary School was opened in 1935, and expanded several times. It now serves as the PACE West School. Inset: Entablature above the front entrance to the old Gainesville Elementary School includes the date of its opening, 1935.

Mrs. Wyrsh. "The students who lived on the east side of U.S. 15, Haymarket, Catharpin and part of Gainesville went to Tyler Elementary. When Antioch-McCrae was deemed to be in poor condition, those students who would have gone to Gainesville were sent to Tyler for kindergarten and first grade, and then to Gainesville Elementary for grades two through five." Antioch-McCrae Elementary School was finally closed in 1982.

Other changes would occur over the years, as the population in Western Prince William steadily grew. Most students in the region, including Haymarket, went to Osbourn High School in Manassas (opened in the early 1950s), followed by Stonewall Jackson and Osbourn Park high schools, which opened in the 1970s.

While it would be several years before Haymarket had its own high school, there was significant shuffling in the lower grades.

"My son was in the last class at Gainesville Elementary," recalled Mrs. Wyrsh. "When Tyler became overcrowded and many felt that Gainesville Elementary needed to be updated, Mountain View Elementary was opened (in September 1995), and Gainesville Elementary became PACE West."

The need for additional elementary school seats continued to grow as more new residents, many with young families, moved into the Haymarket area. J. W. Alvey Elementary was opened in September 2003, and Samuel L. Gravely Jr. Elementary followed in 2008.

In September 2012, Prince William County will open its 16th

middle school on 42 acres near Silver Lake, west of Haymarket. Ground was broken on May 27, 2010 for the 136,622 square foot facility, which will have 52 classrooms and a projected student body of 1,000, relieving overcrowding at the existing middle schools serving Western Prince William.

The School Board has solicited volunteers to serve on the 15-member Silver Lake Middle School Boundary Planning Committee, and public meetings on the new school boundaries will be held. For more information, visit the Prince William County Public Schools Web site at <http://pwcs.edu>.

Much has changed since the citizens' committee was set up in the early 1880s to establish the first public school in Haymarket, but the commitment to provide quality public education for the children of Haymarket and surrounding areas remains the same.

Author John Toler is a writer and historian and has served Fauquier County for over 50 years, including 4 decades with the Fauquier-Times Democrat. He has written and lectured about many legendary characters in Fauquier County's history. Toler is the co-author of *250 Years in Fauquier County: A Virginia Story*, and author of *Warrenton, Virginia: A History of 200 Years*



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The Lightner family of Haymarket, for whom Lightner Road is named, has a long history with the Town of Haymarket, and a tradition of teaching in public education in our area.

Mr. and Mrs. Milton Lightner moved to Haymarket with their family from Augusta County, Va., in 1905. They lived at Maple Spring (later called Bellwood, and most recently named Piedmont), where the Lightners raised eight children: Louis, Jack, Nimrod, Wheatley, Gordon, Jane, Virginia and Lillian. The younger children attended the school in Haymarket when it was located in the old Town Hall building on Washington Street, and later the Haymarket High School, built in 1910 on North Fayette Street.

Several of the Lightner children chose careers in education, as did a number of their children. Lillian was a teacher in Haymarket before marrying Joe Norman and moving to Purcellville, where she also taught school. The Normans later returned to Haymarket, and Lillian resumed teaching there.

Jack Lightner, a career Navy officer, was married to Bennie Terrill, also a schoolteacher, and Jane Lightner Walker taught school at Greenwich and Haymarket.

Louis Lightner, a farmer, married Fauquier County native Estelle Burgess, whom he met while she was teaching in the one-room Waterfall School. The Lightners owned the former William Dodge property known as "Bonnie Brae" northwest of town, where they raised seven children: Louise, Helen, Louis, George, Anne, Margaret and Charlotte.

Louise Lightner has the distinction of attending grades 1-12 at the old Haymarket High School, and graduating with the final class of 17 seniors in 1941. From then on, Haymarket high school students, including the younger Lightners, were bused to Manassas, finishing at the old Osbourn High School.

After graduation, Louise attended Strayer College and worked briefly for the FBI in Washington, D.C. Her first five years in teaching were spent in Loudoun County, after which she returned to Prince William, teaching in elementary schools at Gainesville, Antioch, Yorkshire and Nokesville. During this time she met and married Russell Jamison, a fellow teacher, and they had one son, Rusty.

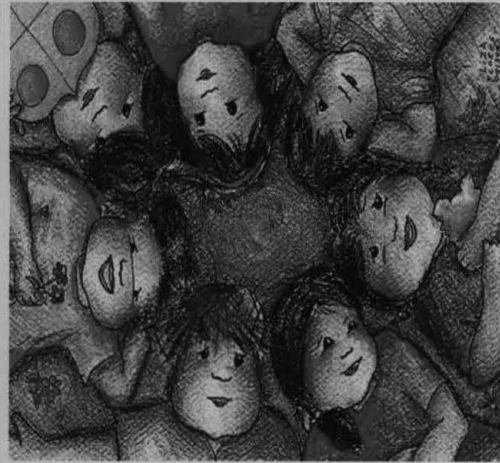
Having a child in the public school system offered Mrs. Jamison the additional opportunity to become involved in public education as a parent, as well as a teacher.

Mrs. Jamison retired after 37 years at the front of the classroom. She recalls working with many dedicated teachers in Haymarket over the years, especially Christine (Mrs. Bladen T.) Dulany, whom she described as "...so very deep into teaching."

With still much to offer after, in 1981 Mrs. Jamison started the 4Rs Pre-school in the old Haymarket Post Office building across from the Town Hall. There she would continue teaching for another 27 years before retiring again in 2008. The 4Rs Pre-school continues to operate in a building on Jefferson Street.

Lightner Tradition continued on page 12

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Today, Louise Jamison and her sister Helen Lightner Ray are next-door neighbors living on Lightner Road, in sight of the old family place and Mountain View Elementary School. Mrs. Jamison still enjoys coming to the classroom, and has spoken to the young students at Mountain View about the Lightner farm that once surrounded the school site.

Recalling Haymarket High School

Both Mrs. Jamison and Mrs. Ray have many memories to share. Growing up, the Lightner children had to walk a mile each way from their home to U.S. 15, where a Mr. Welch, who drove one of the four school buses then operating in Western Prince William County, would pick them up.

Once arriving at the old Haymarket High School, students waited outside until the bell was rung. At that point, they lined up outside according to their grade before entering the school building and heading to class. "Each classroom had a large pot-belly stove, a portrait of George Washington, and the ABCs posted on the wall," recalled Mrs. Jamison. "There was no electricity in the early days, and water was hand-pumped from a well outside." Toilet facilities for boys and girls were also outside, separated by a tall fence.

Once inside the school, high school students took turns leading the opening exercises in their homerooms, which included a Bible reading, pledge of allegiance to the American flag, and the Lord's Prayer. Then classes would begin.

The bell rang first for "little recess," and later for "big recess," during which time the students could play organized games, including basketball on the outdoor court, or just socialize. Baseball could be played on "Peters Field" next to the school during "big recess," and after school.

Lunches were usually brought from home, but later soup prepared in the kitchen of the Gainesville Elementary School was brought to the high school, and sold for five cents a cup.

Lacking an auditorium, programs for the high school, including graduation ceremonies, operettas and plays, were held for many years

in St. Paul's Parish Hall.

There were other aspects of school life in Haymarket in those days. Mrs. Jamison recalls the "Five Point Health Inspection," conducted to monitor the students' personal hygiene, and getting advice like "... always sleep with an open window." In addition, a dentist visited the school every year to examine the students' teeth, and work on any problems he found.

Once a week, a religious education class for students in grades four and five was conducted at the school by a Miss Saunders, as well as a piano teacher who came regularly. However, since the school had no piano, the teacher and students walked over to the home of seventh grade teacher Mrs. Maude Jordan, and used her piano for their lessons.

Mrs. Jamison and Mrs. Ray both recall with fondness the field trips organized by Mrs. Jordan that they took while students at Haymarket High School. "We would ride in the open bed of a farm truck with straw in the back to the National Zoo, Mount Vernon and the museums in

Washington, D.C.," she said. "We always had a glorious time!" Another memory was going with Mrs. Jordan to Mrs. Ella Peters' garage near the school to pick out costumes for plays they put on at the school.

In 1991, former students of Haymarket High School gathered for their only reunion, and all graduates of Haymarket High School were invited. At that time, ten members of Mrs. Jamison's Class of 1941 attended.

Since retiring the second time, Mrs. Jamison continues gathering and sharing the history of the hometown she loves, recalling times gone by with her family and friends,

and remembering the people who have left their mark on Haymarket. Just before her 87th birthday on February 16, 2011, she received a proof of the family history she completed recently. While intended mainly for members of the Lightner and allied families, much of the information in the book is intimately tied to Haymarket – as one might expect it to be.

By John T. Toler



Three members of the Lightner family are seen in this 1905 photograph of students in front of the Haymarket School, located in the old Town Hall building (now the Haymarket Museum) on Washington Street. Indicated on the photo are Virginia, Lillian and Louis Lightner, and their friend, Bess Norman.

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