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Part of county's black heritage restored

One-room schoolhouse used during segregation is reopened for visitors

By **BENNIE SCARTON JR.**
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Friday was a red-letter day for the African-American residents of Prince William County.

Before a large gathering of dignitaries, the historic Lucasville Schoolhouse was reopened to the public following an extensive reconstruction.

The one-room school served the education needs of the county's African-American population in the post-Civil War era, from 1885 to 1926. It is the last of 21 such schools to survive.

The successful construction was a joint effort between Pulte Homes, the Prince William County Historic Preservation Office and local residents, led by Lillian Erotida Gaskill, former chairman of the Prince William County Historical Commission and keynote speaker, who spent the last four years working to bring the day of the dedication to a successful conclusion.

Pulte Homes spent about \$100,000 to reconstruct the school, which was originally built in the general vicinity of the Va. 234 By-pass and Lucasville Road. It is now located in Pulte's Mayfield Trace Community at 10516 Godwin Drive in Manassas.

"As the result of the hard work and vision and commitment of Gaskill, Pulte Homes and the county Department of Historic Preservation, it is fitting that the story of free African-Americans in Prince William begins at the site of this humble school building," said Prince William Board of County Supervisor Wally Covington, in whose district the school is located.

He added, "As I look upon Lucasville School, I am struck by how vulnerable the building appears. In this setting, which was so graciously donated by Pulte Homes, the small stature of the building against the surrounding landscape speaks volumes. The school is symbolic of the 19th century African-American voice of hope for the future, the foundation upon which newly-freed slaves built their own neighborhood here at Lucasville."

The Manassas District School Board authorized an elementary school for the Lucasville neighborhood in November 1883. The school's first students attended in November 1884, the board hired H.W. Lloyd "to build a school house for the use of Lucas School No. 8..." a job Lloyd finished by March 1885. Lucasville School closed in 1926.

The building was moved in the 1930s and remained intact until it was dismantled in 2005. By then, the structure had deteriorated. However, the reconstructed school contains a few of the original boards.

Stanley F. Settle Jr., vice president of land and acquisition, Pulte Homes, Mid Atlantic Division, told the gathering that "Pulte Homes has been honored to be a partner in this process and we greatly appreciate the efforts of Prince William County — and especially local citizens — in helping to make this day a reality."

Settle thanked the residents "for inviting me to participate in this ceremony to officially and publicly reopen the Lucasville School for the first time in 82 years. Though Pulte builds homes that provide for our community's future, we must always move forward while keeping an eye on the past.

"The reconstruction and reopening of this small, but



The reconstructed Lucasville School, near Manassas, was dedicated on Friday. The original one-room school, built for black children in 1885, was open for 41 years.

Photos by Donnie Biggs/News & Messenger

significant important structure is a profound moment in the county's history. The school and its historical impact on our community is an important part of our shared history, and its preservation is something we should all be proud of," he said.

"Lucasville School is the county's only remaining one-room school built for African-American children. It is being preserved so visitors may discover the people who once learned and taught in this small but significant building," Gaskill said as the keynote speaker.

"I can't really explain how excited I am to see this day. It involved a lot, lot, lot of work by many people."



People attending the opening ceremony of the reconstructed school congregated outside on Friday.

See LUCASVILLE, Page A2

LUCASVILLE

Continued from page A1

Also on the program were Prince William County Executive Craig Gerhart, Supervisor John T. Stirrup Jr., R-Gainesville District, and Supervisor Martin E. Nohe, R-Coles District.

In his address, Covington said, "When public schools were first organized in Virginia in 1869 state law provided that white and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school, but in separate schools, under the same general regulations as to management, usefulness and sufficiency. Although we are all too painfully aware that equality

for African-American students in Virginia public schools took almost a century longer to come to fruition, the history of Lucasville School, established in 1883, will bear out that African-American teachers, parents and students sought to be educated and better prepared to negotiate the world around them, however tumultuous the challenges confront them appeared."

Gerhart said the structure would be open to the public today from noon to 4 p.m. and the same hours next Saturday and Sunday, and would be available for tours by appointment by calling 703-792-4754.

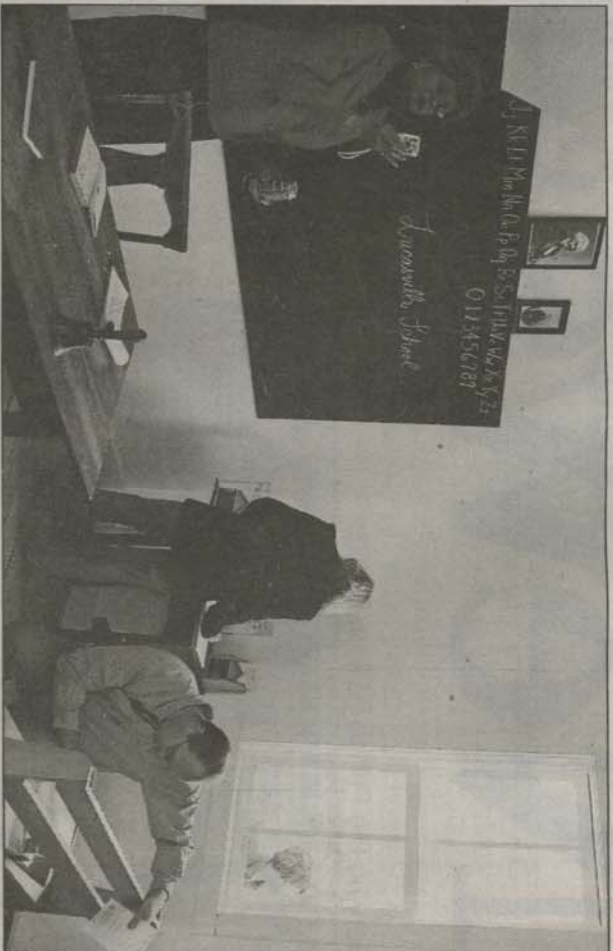
He said the reconstruction cost the county less than \$500, and that it acquired grants of \$14,500 for items on the inside of the building.

They include a pot-bellied stove, desk, seats and backboard, giving the school an appearance similar to how it looked eight decades ago.

Settle summed up the feeling of the gathering by saying "Given that February is Black History month, I can't think of a better time, or place to take a moment to reflect on our sometimes difficult past and rededicate ourselves to a future whose educational boundaries are limitless for all people. Thanks again for asking me to speak today — this truly has been an honor."

Following the ceremony, conducted in a tent behind the school, the school was opened to visitors.

Staff writer *Bonnie Scarton Jr.* can be reached at 703-369-6707.



Donnie Biggs/News & Messenger
Woodbridge resident Winifred Gilmore, left, takes a photograph as Patricia Knock, a black history specialist, signs the guest book and Gainesville resident Doug Hembrey looks at a book during Friday's opening ceremony at Lucasville School.

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