

destinations

HISTORIC SITE FILE: LUCASVILLE SCHOOL
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Lessons Still to be Learned at Lucasville School

The Only Standing African-American School Left in the County



By Audrey Harman, Contributing Writer

When visiting the Lucasville School, located in a residential neighborhood on Godwin Road in Manassas, it is not difficult to just overlook the building entirely. The one-room schoolhouse was once used as a barn after it was closed to students, so it is no surprise that at first glance it blends in with the nearby storage sheds. The white contrast of the building and the historic marker draws eyes toward it, however, and invites visitors to come and learn its historic value.

Lucasville School was an African American school from 1885 to 1926 that was part of the Manassas School District. Though the site and most of the building are not original, the building holds a lot of importance to the history of education and equality between blacks and whites in the United States. The current structure has been deconstructed and relocated several times since it officially closed in 1926 and has been at its current location since 2007. As it stands today, the school has been reconstructed using both new and old materials. The building is set up inside as it is believed to have been during its years of operation.

At the front of the school sits the teacher's desk, which faces the rows of benches and desks for the students; behind the teacher's desk is a blackboard. The entire one-room schoolhouse is heated by a wood stove that runs along the ceiling and down to the



Photo courtesy Prince William County
Division of Historic Preservation

Interior of the Lucasville School as it stands today. This is how it is believed to have looked back when school was in session based on historic accounts of other local black schools.

middle of the room. According to *Yesterday's Schools*, by Lucy Walsh Phinney, Lucasville School was originally located at the intersection of Lucasville Road and Godwin Drive and was built by H.W. Lloyd using the blueprints for the Bradley School, which was the area's white school.



The original structure in 2003 before it was moved. The building was being used as a barn at the time.

According to the exhibition materials for the site compiled by Heather Hembrey, a preservationist for the county, "Lucasville School reminds us of earlier Prince William County citizens' efforts to challenge racism and create an effective and lasting public education system."

Lucasville School was built after 1870 when Virginia's legislature created a statewide free public school system for all. Every citizen, regardless of race or ethnicity, could obtain a formal education. Most newly freed African American parents encouraged their children to attend school, as those with a higher education generally had more opportunities for success and leadership. Within the information found on the walls of the school, Booker T. Washington, the preeminent African American educator of the era, was quoted as saying: "Few people who are not right in the midst of the scenes can form any exact idea of the intense desire which people of my race showed for education. It was a whole race trying to go to school. Few were too young, and none too old, to make the attempt to learn." Due to the proximity of the Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth, it is believed that, over the years, some of Lucasville's 17 teachers were graduates of the Industrial School and very well educated.

Mike Riley, the historic site director at Lucasville School and Brentsville Courthouse, noted that because Lucasville's teachers were graduates of a secondary school and certified, Lucasville may have had better teachers than some of the surrounding white schools. Despite the fact that students received an education from first-rate teachers, Riley said that it was "rare that they got anything new, like books. They were mostly hand-me-downs from the white schools. The only thing new they did get was chalk." He pointed out a similar quote displayed on the school's wall taken during an interview with Pauline Davis by Heather Hembrey in 2006. Davis had been a student at the Brown School (another African American school in Manassas) in the 1930s and '40s.



Current reconstructed exterior as the school stands on Godwin Drive today.

Two influential teachers at Lucasville were wife and husband Alice A. Taylor and William C. Taylor, both of whom were educated at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. Alice taught at Lucasville for up to 16 years, and William taught for a few as well. Alice taught at the school until it closed in 1926. She is quoted as saying in a letter to Berea College President William Frost in 1904 in regard to her students: "I have reared my children to know their friends by conduct not by color. I never allow them to hear of slavery and its horrors, therefore, they regard everyone as friend and know nothing of bitterness or caste." Alice's views helped her students see their futures unclouded and free of the obstacles of the past when it would have been unheard of for them to be educated. Both black and white institutions were viewed as equal until the 1890s when, during the "Jim Crow" era, many southern states, including Virginia, began to further limit African Americans' statuses legally and socially.

Lucasville School was reconstructed and reopened in 2007 by the county with the help of Pulte Homes, Inc. Since the reopening of the school, it is normally open by appointment only. During the month of February (Black History Month), however, the school will be open to the public from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, and admission is free. In honor of the students who attended Lucasville School and celebrated Black History Month by reading Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and learning about Frederick Douglass, Phillis Wheatley, and Booker T. Washington, come out and see for yourself the only standing African American school left in the county.

Lucasville School is located at 10516 Godwin Drive, Manassas. [PW](#)

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