Chapter 8.
A SEGREGATED SYSTEM

Segregation was the way of education in the South since time immemorial. Black and white children were not educated together and, indeed, plantation owners who tried to teach their slaves were punished. Even following the Emancipation Proclamation, there was no equality in the education of the races. All the old school records refer to schools as either "white" or "colored". Although both were under the jurisdiction of the County and District School Boards as well as the Superintendent of Schools, this does not mean that they were treated equally.

From the beginning, the colored schools were more poorly equipped, were taught by teachers who usually did not have a college degree and who were paid less than their white counterparts. The colored schools were usually in session for terms shorter than those for the white children simply because there was not enough money to keep them open longer. When, in 1924, buses began to provide transportation for children going to school, it was only for white children. Young black students continued to walk often long distances along poor roads to get to their schoolhouse.

Taxes collected from the black community went more often for the white schools than for the colored schools, so the black communities in effect had to contribute twice (once in taxes and again in donations) to the county school funds. As James Anderson says in his book, *The Education of Blacks in the South,*

> In vital respects, the regionwide process of double taxation was an accommodation to the oppressive nature of southern society. It made the regular process of excluding black children from the benefits of tax-supported public education easier and more bearable for both whites and blacks. It said much about blacks' desire for education and their willingness to sacrifice for it, but it also said much about their powerlessness, their taxation without representation, and their oppression.[1]

The differences between the support given to the white schools and those for black children show up time and again in the lists of expenses incurred by the District School Boards in the county. For example, in 1892, the Brentsville District Board purchased maps, charts and dictionaries for six District schools: Brentsville, Nokesville, Greenwich, Vancluse/Hazelwood, Bristoe and Allendale—all white schools. Noticeably missing from the list is the Chinn Colored School. Similarly, in November of 1894 the Brentsville Board bought Kennedy Mathematical Blocks for all the District schools except #4, Chinn. Again, on January 27, 1896, the Board purchased seven sets of Primary Language study books although there were eight schools in the District, seven white and one colored. In April of 1899, seven Rand McNally maps of the United States in cases, seven maps of Virginia and seven maps of West Virginia were bought by the Board for a total of $161.91 (payable over two years). There were eight schools then, too.

Yet another example of the differences in the way white and colored schools were treated is found in minutes of the Brentsville District School Board

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James D. Anderson. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935,* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, pp.184-185.

from 1907. There it is recorded that the Board agreed to establish a colored school at Brentsville which was to be open for a five months' term with the teacher being paid $20 a month (white teachers at that time were paid $25 per month), providing the legal average daily attendance was maintained. "The patrons [were] to furnish building and furniture, wood and etc...."[2] No funds for the schoolhouse itself could be spared from the Board's budget. Yet at the same meeting, the Board approved the purchase of five new desks for the white Woodlawn School.

For more than half a century, funds to build and run the County schoolhouses were raised in large part from the citizens served by each school. It follows that in those communities where most citizens were poor, funds that could be spared for education amounted to less than in the more well-to-do and usually white areas. It does not ever appear that the desire for an education was less in the black communities; rather, their ability to raise funds was more limited. In report after report filed at the end of each school year by every teacher in the county, it was noted by the teachers of the colored schools that there were no books or, at best, very few books, in the libraries of their schools. They simply were beyond the means of the community which supported that school.

The inequities in the treatment of the schools continued well into the twentieth century. As late as 1959, when Mr. Russell Fincham, a black educator, was appointed to be principal of the Antioch-Macrae Elementary School, the discrimination persisted. Mr. Fincham, after teaching an entire school day, spent the rest of the day doing administrative business without the aid of either a secretary or a telephone. He even borrowed a truck from the County and drove, on his own free time, to Manhattan where a friend helped him secure textbooks which were more up to date than the ones supplied to his school by the County. "We definitely were way behind as far as other elementary schools, white schools, were concerned," Mr. Fincham later said.[3]

Figures from the 1906-07 school year show that it cost $303 per month to run a schoolhouse for white children. It cost $119 a month to run one for black children. This reflects the lower salaries paid to the teachers, the fewer months in which the schools were kept open and the scarcity of supplies purchased for those schools. There were, of course, some bright spots: special teachers whose worth was appreciated by the District Boards; groups of parents who worked particularly hard to provide for their children's needs in school; schoolhouses kept immaculate in spite of poor conditions. Hot lunches were being served in six of the colored schools by the 1930s, with the cooperation of the County welfare agency, to provide help for undernourished children. Also, by that time, every colored school[4] except for Thornton and Neabsco had a Community School League, a group of supporters who worked to improve the quality of education for their children in a number of ways. They purchased a library for each school and enlarged those buildings which were overcrowded (remember, consolidation did not include the colored schools at first). They raised funds to build a new schoolhouse when the County School Board would not agree to do so and to make salaries available to teachers so they could keep the schools open longer. Beautification of school grounds was traditionally the work of all the Community Leagues, both white and black. In addition, every colored school had a Junior League solely for activities for the students.

While white teachers almost always were high school graduates by the 1920s, it took a little longer before the same could be said for the black teachers. Even as late as 1920, few held high school diplomas. Many of those who did were graduates of the Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth, founded by Miss Jennie Dean. There were exceptions, of course. Teacher training for those black students who wanted it and could afford it was available in Washington, DC at Minor College; at Virginia State College in Hampton; and at St. Paul Normal and Industrial School in Lawrenceville, Virginia. As the century moved on, most of the black teachers in Prince William County were graduates of one of these institutions. The holding of an ad-

[2]Brentsville District School Board minutes of October 4, 1907, p.274.

[3]Alexandra Stoddard. "Four teachers were in the vanguard of change in schools", *The Potomac News*, February 11, 1993, p.C3

[4]White schools had Community Leagues too but they did not have to use their funds in quite the same ways. Schoolhouses and their furnishings were provided for them by the District School Boards. This sometimes was the case for the black schools but not always.

vanced degree did not seem to change the salaries any, either of white or black teachers. Neither did years of experience seem to play any role in the salary scale. For example, during the 1925-26 school year, white female teachers were paid salaries ranging from $65 to $85 a month for the term of eight months. Black male and female teachers were paid $60, or rarely $65, a month for a seven months' term. If there were white male teachers, none filed a year end report. Interestingly, figures for 1933 show that white female teachers earned more per year than did white males ($693.50 vs. $675) and both earned more than black teachers ($400 for a male, $392.02 for a female). This flies in the face of most figures from other parts of the country where males earned more than females no matter what race.

A frequent complaint of the black teachers was the failure of school officials to visit their schoolhouses during the school year. School Superintendents, therefore, did not see the great needs of the children or the difficult conditions under which some teachers worked. This lack of visitation is not explained; it apparently was "the way things were". Because the black people were not allowed to vote, they had no say in who represented them either on the Board of Supervisors or the School Boards (both District and County).

Hopefully things began to improve after 1916 when the County School Board approved the expenditure of $60 a month for the salary of a Colored Supervisor of Rural Schools. This salary was raised to $100 a month the following year.

If sufficient help for the colored schools could not come from within the communities, and did not come from the District or County Boards, it did come from benefactors outside the State. Two particular sources of funds stand out. For many years, The Friends Society for the Aid and Education of the Freedman, a Quaker group from Philadelphia, had sent funds for the education of black children. When the schools became public in 1870, the Manassas District School Board wrote to the Friends and asked if they would continue to fund the colored school. They agreed and their gifts paid for teacher salaries, among other things, for many years. The section about the Brown School in Manassas has more information about this interesting relationship.

Secondly, beginning in 1914, some help came from Mr. Rosenwald, the multi-millionaire owner of Sears-Roebuck Company. When the members of the black community were able to buy land on which to build a school (land later donated to the County for that purpose) and raise some funds toward its building, additional money from the Rosenwald Fund was then donated and, along with public tax funds collected from black taxpayers of the community, was used to erect the building.

These schoolhouses were available only to the black communities and there were major conditions which had to be met. First, the rules said that "that the sites and buildings of all schools aided by the Fund shall be the property of the public school authorities," and, secondly, "that, in providing these buildings, it is a condition precedent to receiving the aid of the Fund that the people of the several communities shall secure, from other sources: to wit—from public school funds, private contributions, etc., an amount equal to or greater than that provided by the Fund."[5] Thus, the black communities had to donate money, land, time and labor in order for their children to receive "public" education. Between 1914 and 1927, Rosenwald money helped to build (by paying an average of 17% of the total cost) 306 schoolhouses in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

While many parts of the South failed to provide any schooling for the black children of the communities, this does not seem to be the case in Prince William County. Though the colored schools were physically inferior to their white counterparts, as noted above, there were schools available. By 1875, five years after the County began its public elementary school system, there were ten schools for white children and three for black children. By the turn of the century, there were forty-nine white schools and thirteen schools for the black population. Twenty years later, there were forty-five schools for whites, twelve for black children; by 1935, the numbers had reflected the effects of consolidation of the white schools which now numbered nineteen while there were still twelve schools for black children. In most cases, the colored schools had to serve a larger population of children than did those for white students. The following table, based on figures for 1900 as supplied by the then Superintendent of Schools Dr. H.M. Clarkson, illustrates this point:

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[5]Anderson, p.159.

District	School Population			# of Schools		
	White	Colored	Total	White	Colored	Total
Brentsville	513	111	624	8	1	9
Coles	428	32	460	8	0	8
Dumfries	369	162	531	8	2	10
Gainesville	538	436	974	9	5	14
Manassas	812	369	1181	9	4	13

These figures remained much the same until consolidation in 1923 reduced the number of schools for white children. This did not reduce the number of teachers for those pupils; it merely increased the number of classrooms in the schools built as center or consolidated schoolhouses in the various districts of the county.

In 1954, the Supreme Court's decision in "Brown vs the Board of Education" that "separate but equal" education was unconstitutional was the beginning of the end for the County's segregated school system. The County School Board decided to comply with the order for integration by offering black students the option to attend the school of their choice. Not surprisingly, no black students chose to attend traditionally white schools. Indeed, it was five years before a black student entered a school she wanted to attend, rather than one she was assigned to attend.[6]

By 1964, seven county schools were integrated. That year, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act which threatened to cut off all school funding unless desegregation was successfully implemented. To comply fully with the law, Superintendent of Schools Stuart Beville began to integrate the school faculties. In mid-1965 he assigned four women educators from traditionally black schools to teach at four white County schools (Featherstone, Loch Lomond and Dumfries Elementary Schools and Fred Lynn Middle School). With understandable trepidation, the women undertook their new assignments and the transfer was successful.

The student bodies, however, remained largely segregated. It was not until the 1966-67 school year, when students were assigned to schools on a regional basis, that the three remaining colored schools in the County (Antioch-Macrae, Washington-Reid and Jennie Dean) finally became desegregated. The following year, school population figures showed that there were 24,927 white students and 1,358 black students enrolled in Prince William County schools. The minority students were certainly at a disadvantage; for example, because of their small numbers they were not able to get elected to school or club offices.[7] Still, it is generally agreed that the transition was a peaceful one, although problems remained and are still unsolved today. In an interview in 1993, retired teacher and principal, Russell Fincham said, "You can desegregate, but it's hard to integrate. You can say we desegregated back in 1966 but we still have a ways to go....We aren't there yet."[8]

[6]That student was Joyce Russell, who chose to attend Gar-Field High School. At the same time, her younger brother enrolled in Occoquan Elementary School. The two were responsible for the official integration of Prince William County Schools. The year was 1961.

[7]For further information on the integration of Prince William County, see "Learning Together" in the Lifestyles section of *The Potomac News* of February 10 and 11, 1993, written by Alexandra Stoddard and Chris LeSonde.

[8]Stoddard, p.5.