New Fairfax County Historical Markers in Lee District/Franconia

By Jim Cox

Laurel Grove Marker Unveiled June 13, 2009

On Saturday June 13 the Fairfax Historical Marker commemorating the establishment of a segregated school for Franconia's African American students in the 1880's, was dedicated in a very well attended ceremony. Laurel Grove School was established on land donated by the Jasper Family, former slaves at Mount Vernon that bought land on the present day Beulah Road, just prior to the Civil War. Phyllis



Walker Ford says "The marker symbolizes the unity among African American families in Franconia to overcome hardships and build a school to educate the first generation born to freedom."

The Connection Newspapers published an excellent article by Colin Daileda, on Thursday, June 18, 2009, that describes the dedication:

> *From schoolhouse to "living museum" to an official piece of American history, the Laurel Grove School has been through a lot since being constructed by freed slaves in the early 1880s. This past Saturday, June 13, a ceremony took place at the school in Franconia to unveil a historical marker that gave a brief description of the school and the people who founded it as well as the church that was once right next door. Members of the Laurel Grove School Association (LGSA) and those with family ties to the school have always known its historical significance. But with the historical marker comes the opportunity for community members to become acquainted with the history of a schoolhouse in their own backyard.*
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> *"The community can now be tuned into what this building is, what it represents," said William E. DePuy Jr., LGSA Board of Directors vice president. "It's an essential piece of Virginian and national history."*
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> *Board of Directors member Florence King echoed that sentiment. "It will give not only visibility to the community but … they will see this marker is there for a reason and when they read it and see the timeline they will say 'wow'," said King.*
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> *Two people familiar with the school's timeline are former students Marguerite Williams and Elicadeth Blackwell. Williams began attending in 1923, while Blackwell first sat down at Laurel Grove School in the early 1930s. Both attended until 1932, when it was closed due to a lack of students. "I never would have thought in my life there'd be anything here like that," said Williams, referring to the marker. "After school was out, I thought that was it. It's a blessing and it's a good landmark."*
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> *The historical landmark can inform a passersby of the significance of Laurel Grove School, but step inside the old schoolhouse today and one will find photographs of former students, examples of the curriculum taught to those students,*

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those students, and much more. he inside of Laurel Grove School tells the story of a people, or as LGSA Board of Directors President Phyllis Ford said, "The wonderful story of what happens after slavery." "We all think of slavery as being that God-awful thing," said Ford. "But after that, what did families do and what was important to them? Education and their faith. " The importance of education is very much alive in what the LGSA does today. They are compiling information about the school and the history of the black community in the Franconia area and inserting it into the curriculum of area elementary schools, starting with the fourth grade.

"What they're doing … here is fabulous," said State Sen. George Barker (D-39), who attended the unveiling ceremony. "It'll help kids growing up understand sort of what the history is and the types of commitments people had to get education back in the 19th century."

The unveiling was attended by about a hundred people including LGSA Board, members of the Fairfax County History Commission, of course Franconia Museum Directors like myself, and most importantly many descendants of the original founders of



the Laurel Grove School, Church and Community. This marker would not have happened with out the efforts of Phyllis Ford. She worked with the Lee District History Commissioners (Don Hakenson and myself) to create a package for the Marker Committee Chairman Jack Hiller, and presented the request to the entire Fairfax County History Commission at a monthly meeting. She was able to get the commission to approve the marker and provide one-half of the funding. I was very excited to see the marker get installed, and know that I participated in the process!

Beacon Field Marker Unveiled August 19, 2009



From the Friends of Beacon Field Website:

Friends of Beacon Field Airport joined in with Lee District Supervisor Jeff McKay, US Congressman Gerry Connolly, and Harry P. Lehman to dedicate the Historic Marker at the site GPS coordinates 38º46'12.20"N : 77º4'58.33"W . Master of Ceremony Supervisor McKay welcomed everyone to Groveton and introduced notable personalities in the crowd,

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