

THE ANTIOCH NORTH FORK SCHOOL
THE ANTIOCH MURRAY SCHOOL

Information from “YESTERDAY’S SCHOOLS by Lucy Walsh Phinney

Gainesville School District #3
Colored
1871? – 1953

The Antioch School was one of the northern group of four colored schools which also included Macrae, North Fork, or Thoroughfare Colored, and Thornton Schools. During the course of its history, it has been located on three different sites, all in the foothills of Bull Run Mountain.

The first Antioch Schoolhouse was located about 0.6 miles south of the intersection of Jackson Hollow and Waterfall Roads. No records remain which pinpoint the exact date of its opening but it was probably during the very early 1870’s. Antioch was the third schoolhouse to be established by the Gainesville District School Board. It was a one-room schoolhouse up on a hill on land owned by the Murray Family and was referred to, in the early years, as the Murray School. In 1879, Mr. Joshua Murray was appointed to teach the school for a salary of \$20 a month. He may have been the teacher prior to that, but no records corroborate this. The Murray School served the black community around waterfall for nearly ten years. When increased enrollment made a move to larger quarters necessary, the Antioch (Murray) School was abandoned and sold several years later to Mr. Mack Helm for a total of \$15.00.

Very early District School Board records state that in 1880, the Antioch schoolhouse for white children was given over to the education of the black children of the community. A new school for white students was built in Waterfall in 1880 so the old building would have been surplus. This second Antioch School building was located on Mountain Road behind the Olive Branch Baptist Church where the parking lot now stands. This was also the location of a Waterfall Schoolhouse, according to the 1901 map of the county drawn by Mr. William H. Brown.

District School Board minutes in 1883 show that the teacher, Mr. Robinson, requested from the School Board either an assistant or more compensation because of the large number of pupils. His request was denied at the time, but at the end of the school year he was given an additional month’s salary of \$25.00. According to those same 1883 School Board minutes, a request by local citizens to use the school-house for entertainment was also denied by the Board. The second Antioch Schoolhouse served the black children of the Waterfall area until 1904.

For the third and final Antioch School building, the District School Board and Superintendent of Schools Clarkson chose a site on Jackson Hollow Road near the area known as Bridgetown (also called Bridgett Town on the historic map of the county drawn in 1992 by Eugene Scheel). A sum of \$2000 was set aside for the erection of a two-room school. In 1896 the Board purchased half an acre of land from Mrs. George Smith for \$15 and gave the contract for the building of the schoolhouse to Mr. E. C. Walter. The half acre was barely large enough to hold the schoolhouse, the well and the privies. This was often the case when schools for the black children were built; it was the white schools, generally, which sat on parcels of land big enough for a nice playground. Mr. Walter’s work was so good that he was given an additional \$5 bonus as well as a contract to build two outhouses for \$20. It must have been a good job, because

that Antioch School remained in service for nearly fifty years, until it combined with the Macrae School in 1953. The board also paid Mr. H. Howdershell, the District Board chairman, \$1.50 to move the desks, stove, etc. from the old to the new building.

That third schoolhouse was a one story, two room frame building with a peaked metal roof. The walls and ceiling were of wood and each room was heated by a wood-burning stove. It was a design commonly used by the county for school construction of the time. Two teachers were unemployed. The teachers and pupils all shared in the care of the school. Sometime around 1920 a group of school friends and parents organized the Armstrong School League for the purpose of buying a playground for the school. They purchased one acre of land along the north side of the school site from W. N. Darnell. The one and a half acre site continued to be slowly improved and, eventually, electricity was added. The toilets were pits but they did meet state standards of acceptability.

In 1906, Mrs. Susie Nickens began her long teaching career in Prince William County when the School Board hired her to teach the primary students at Antioch. Two years later, the School Board directed the Clerk of the School District to notify the Commonwealth's Attorney that a distillery was located "very near" the schoolhouse. The Board asked that it be abolished if it was found to be closer to the school than the law allowed.

In 1926-27, the teacher of grades 4-7 was Miss C. T. Dunkins who was only twenty-three years old but already had six years experience in teaching. She was a high school graduate, unusual for black teachers in that time, but was still paid the usual \$60 a month or \$420 for the seven month term. She paid \$15 monthly for her room and board in the community. The teacher for grades 1-3 was Pearl Fletcher. There were twenty-six children enrolled that year, nine in the first four grades and seventeen in grades 5-7. Of that number, eight failed and two dropped out. There were no books in the school library and no school official made a visit to the school that year.

The following year, Mrs. Fletcher had been replaced by Dorothy W. Brice, but Miss Dunkins stayed on. By the 1929-30 school year, both of these teachers were gone and their places were taken over by Ella Lee Morgan who taught the fourth through seventh grades and Miss Louise Gertrude Knight who taught the primary classes. It must have been difficult to teach in such an isolated and poorly equipped school. In 1934, when superintendant Haydon wrote his report on all county schools, water still had to be carried from a distance though a well was in the future plans. In that same year, the desks were rated "fair", bookcases were needed although there were only a few books other than texts and those came from the teachers, and no maps or globes.