

# PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS FOR BLACK STUDENTS

Johnson City, Tennessee

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The following is an attempt to document the various stages of the structures that have served as public schools exclusively for Black students in Johnson City, Tennessee over the years. The first one was part of the Washington County school system. All the others were parts of the Johnson City school system, which was organized in 1888 (or possibly in 1886 or 1887). Photos of most stages of these buildings exist except for the two Roan Hill schools, the only ones which were not brick structures. Neither of those is still standing.

I am concerned here only with the physical structures of these schools. The people involved are of course even more important to the story – teachers and coaches and principals, students and graduates. Mary Henderson Alexander does a capable job of chronicling the life of these schools, especially of Langston – of the people involved and especially of the struggle to desegregate the city's schools – in chapter 3 of her Masters Thesis.<sup>1</sup>

If anyone knows that I've made any mistakes here, please let me know. I want to correct them.  
[Note: Where pages in a source are unnumbered, I give them in square brackets.]

## BRIEF SUMMARY

**First Roan Hill School**, log, approximately at today's 1301 or 1303 Buffalo St. at top of hill  
first used by White people as school and church during and right after the Civil War  
first used by Black people as school and church about 1866 or 1867  
closed 1889  
disappeared 1923 or earlier

(Between 1889 and 1893 Johnson City's Black school was held in the buildings of two different Black churches.)

**Langston High School**, brick, 226 E. Myrtle Ave corner of Elm St.

opened 1893  
enlarged before 1908, possibly around 1902 or 1903  
auditorium and cafeteria added 1925 (or 1922?)  
gymnasium and industrial shop added 1930  
original part demolished and replaced 1956  
all demolished 2017 except the 1930 unit and the entrance to the 1925 unit

**Dunbar School** (originally **Woolwine School**), brick, 204-209 Elmo St. (now Garden Dr.)  
at Chilhowie Ave.

opened 1907  
enlarged 1921  
further enlarged 1956

**Douglass School**, brick, 1412 E. Millard Ave. at the end of Earl St.  
opened 1922

**Second Roan Hill School**, frame, 338 W. Highland Rd.  
opened late 1925 (or possibly early 1926)  
closed 1941 apparently  
demolished apparently in the 1960s (?).

End of segregation of Johnson City public schools 1965

## DISCUSSION

### FIRST ROAN HILL SCHOOL

The first Roan Hill School, log, stood approximately at what is today 1301/1303 Buffalo St., on its northeast side at or near the highest point.<sup>2</sup> It was a one-room log cabin out in the country back in those days. It was built on three quarters of an acre of land which Peter Range had sold on Sept. 6, 1849<sup>3</sup> to “the common School Commissioners” of what was then School District No. 57. He sold it “for the dual purpose of school and church.”<sup>4</sup> Range sold this plot for \$10. Possibly that was merely a nominal price back then. Range may have been virtually donating the land to the county.<sup>5</sup>

The one-room log cabin was first used by White people as a school and church during and right after the Civil War if not sooner – though presumably these White people brought their slaves to church with them and allowed free Blacks to join them in worship, the widespread pattern before Emancipation. Evidently Johnson City Presbyterians worshiped there before they organized First Presbyterian Church in 1869.<sup>6</sup> From the early 1860s,<sup>7</sup> or “about 1864,”<sup>8</sup> the building housed a school for White students. Evidently this “school” was the Science Hill Literary and Debating Society, which had been organized a bit earlier in Oak Grove, a small community about 7½ miles northwest of Johnson’s Depot. That Society soon became the Science Hill Seminary or Academy<sup>9</sup> and would later morph into Johnson City’s Science Hill High School. But the White school ceased to use the building in 1866 upon moving to a new building on what had been the Brush Creek Campground of the Methodist Church,<sup>10</sup> which was closer to Henry Johnson’s new village. After the White school vacated the log cabin on Roan Hill, that building came to be used as a school for Black students and an interdenominational Black church, either in 1866 or soon after, and it continued to be until 1889. By the later 1800s a well established Black burial ground had developed adjacent to the meetinghouse/schoolhouse.<sup>11</sup>

No one seems to know what use, if any, the log schoolhouse saw after 1889. Even if it saw other uses for a while, it probably deteriorated gradually over time. By 1923 Dr. James H. Preas owned the property around it. That year, in order to acquire clear ownership of the county school board property as well, which he thought he had lawfully bought, he arranged a property exchange involving some deed swaps by which West Lawn Cemetery was doubled in size<sup>12</sup> and whatever human remains could be located in the old Roan Hill Cemetery were to be exhumed and reinterred at West Lawn at his expense. There is no record of how many graves were thus moved, let alone of what the costs for that operation were or how much Dr. Preas paid for it.<sup>13</sup> Nor do the surviving records of the transactions involved mention the old log schoolhouse. If any traces of it still remained in 1923, they must surely have been removed at that time.

### LANGSTON HIGH SCHOOL

Langston High School, brick, 226 E. Myrtle Ave. corner of Elm St.,<sup>14</sup> opened in 1893, most probably on Nov. 27.<sup>15</sup> One photograph is known to exist of the original building.

Sometime before 1908 the city nearly doubled the size of the original 1893 Langston building by extending it toward Elm Street, doubling its classrooms to a total of eight and surely adding rest rooms.<sup>16</sup> So far I have not been able to find any evidence to prove when this addition was built. It likely occurred between 1900 and 1905, possibly around 1902 or 1903, but it definitely occurred before 1908 because that enlargement is already seen in a photo taken that year. Also, the trees around the addition are already much too tall to have been planted only a year or two before 1908. Moreover, another photo that includes this addition must have been taken a few years before 1908 because in it the two trees at the corners of the portico are not yet as tall as they are in that picture. I’d guess 1905 or 1906 for that picture and around 1902 or 1903 for the addition.<sup>17</sup> At least three photos exist of the building at this stage.

It is widely accepted that the auditorium and cafeteria were added to the enlarged original building in 1925 (the date over its entrance from Elm Street; but according to other sources that unit was added in 1922).<sup>18</sup> The gymnasium and industrial shop were added in 1930.<sup>19</sup> Then in 1956 Langston’s

original building was torn down and replaced by a new section with lots of windows across the Myrtle Avenue side.<sup>20</sup> I'm not sure whether the library section (also along Myrtle Avenue) was also part of the 1954 construction, but I think so. I hope someone knows and will inform me.

The only parts of this collection that are still standing today are the 1930 unit that was the gymnasium and shop plus the entrance to the 1925 auditorium, now only as a stand-alone remembrance arch. All the rest was torn down in 2017.

The school was not always known as Langston High School. As far as I know, no one has ever found evidence of when the school took the name Langston in honor of Congressman John Mercer Langston. It's named "Langston School" at least as early as 1903.<sup>21</sup> In its early years it was designated a "normal school," which meant that its mission included preparing people to teach school. Thus, we read "Langston Normal School" for some of its earliest years, possibly even before the school adopted the name Langston.

Whether it qualified as a "high school" from its beginning is also uncertain. What is known is that at first it included grades 1 through 10 or 11. It did not include grade 12 (and maybe not grade 11) until 1922. That year Langston added grade 12 and maybe also grade 11 when the Rev. J. H. Byers was its principal.<sup>22</sup> Several sources seem certain that the school did not include grade 11 until then, but Julia N. Hankal contends that it did: "...on May 21, 1897, we were glad to say that there was a class which had finished the course of eleven grades then prescribed by the City Board of Education."<sup>23</sup> One would think that Ms. Hankal would have known, since she was one of the two students who graduated from Langston on that date, the school's tiny first graduating class. Maybe her memory 44 years later was faulty, but that thought seems to tax credence, since "she was there" and was very directly affected and ought to have known what grade she had completed.

I do not know whether Johnson City's Science Hill High School (for White students) added a 12<sup>th</sup> and perhaps an 11<sup>th</sup> grade earlier than Langston did or not. Johnson City public schools did not have kindergartens until perhaps the mid-1960s, maybe around the time when the city ended school segregation (1965). Long before that, Langston had become a high school only, the city having created elementary schools for its Black students.

### DUNBAR SCHOOL

**Dunbar School**, brick, 204-208 Elmo St. (today's Garden Drive) corner of Chilhowie Ave.,<sup>24</sup> opened in 1907.<sup>25</sup> Originally named **Woolwine School** after the Rev. P.A. Woolwine, founder and builder of Elmo Street Methodist Episcopal Church, now West Market Street United Methodist Church.<sup>26</sup> Maybe about 1910<sup>27</sup> the school was renamed **Dunbar** after the celebrated Black poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar, who had died in 1906.

There's a photo of the newly completed building (the oldest part of the existing building, which is now the home of Grace Temple Church, Eternal Life Center).<sup>28</sup>

The city purchased the land for this building on August 11, 1906.<sup>29</sup> It erected an addition to the building in 1921 (finished in 1922?)<sup>30</sup> and another addition in 1956.<sup>31</sup>

### DOUGLASS SCHOOL

**Douglass School**, brick, 1412 E. Millard Ave. at the end of Earl St.,<sup>32</sup> opened in 1922.<sup>33</sup> The city created this school to meet the needs of the concentration of Black families in the northeastern part of the city, particularly northeast of Broadway, since they lived some distance away from such concentrations in the central and west central and southern parts of the city and from Dunbar School in the west central part. I'm not sure whether later additions were made to this building. Sometime after the end of segregation its facility became the home of Dawn of Hope Inc., a non-profit agency serving adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

## SECOND ROAN HILL SCHOOL

In the mid-1920s the city created a second Roan Hill School, housed in a one-story white frame building,<sup>34</sup> to meet the needs of a concentration of Black families in the southern part of the city, around and south of Roan Hill or Holly Hill, since even Dunbar School was more than 1½ miles of walking each way for children who lived there. To serve this purpose, the city acquired an existing frame building and remodeled it to suit the needs of an elementary school. Mary Henderson Alexander narrates how this all came about in her Masters Thesis.<sup>35</sup> This later Roan Hill School included grades 1 through 4 only. It opened in late 1925 (or possibly early 1926?) and operated until 1941.<sup>36</sup> The building is no longer standing.<sup>37</sup>

Surviving records of this school seem to be few and sketchy, and we are rapidly losing the memories of people who attended it. There is even debate about where the building was located, but of the competing addresses for it I am convinced that it stood at 338 W. Highland Rd., on the northeast corner (technically, the north corner) of W. Highland Rd. and Knox St.<sup>38</sup> Aaron Redd, who attended this school as a boy, says that was its location – on a part of W. Highland Rd. that no longer exists.<sup>39</sup> This school began and ended well before the city bought this entire area for urban renewal and demolished the buildings in it around 1964.

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## SOURCES

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- Daniels, Ophelia Cope. "The Formative Years of Johnson City, Tennessee, 1885-1890: A Social History." M.S. Thesis, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College, August 1947.
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- The Langston High School Annual 1912: Carnation*.
- The Langston Spectator*, the school's 1911 annual.
- The Langston Voice*, the school's 1909 annual, Vol. 1, No. 1.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Johnson City, Tennessee, years 1903 (Sheet 12), 1908 (Sheet 11), 1913 (Sheet 11), 1920 (Sheet 5), 1927 (Sheet 5), 1948 (Sheet 5), and 1961-3 (Sheet 5).
- Smallwood, Sidney. "A History of Education in Washington County." In *History of Washington County Tennessee 1988*, edited by James T. Dykes, Dessie L. Simmons, et al., 62-68. Watauga Association of Genealogists, 1988.
- Stahl, Ray. *Greater Johnson City, A Pictorial History*. Norfolk/Virginia Beach: Donning Company, publishers, 1983.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Henderson Alexander, "Black Life in Johnson City, Tennessee 1856 – 1965: A Historical Chronology" (M.A. Thesis, East Tennessee State University, August 2001), Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Deed Book 161, p. 177, paragraph 4. For this street address, cf. Washington County TNGenWeb, <http://tngenweb.org/washington/records-data/cemeteries/cemeteries-of-washington-county-tennessee>, s.v. Roan Hill Cemetery – regarding the location of the Black cemetery that developed adjacent to the schoolhouse/ meetinghouse.

<sup>3</sup> Deed Book 40, pp. 547-548. The deed is attested by Henry Johnson and William T. Range. The enterprising Henry Johnson would buy a piece of land from Tipton Jobe beside the road from Jonesborough to Elizabethton at the point where the projected East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad planned to cross it. And there he would build a general store and a tank from which the locomotives could take on water – “Johnson’s tank.” I think he would also rent out rooms in his building there, and he probably landed a post office in his establishment before long. Johnson City would grow from that beginning. But when Henry Johnson attested this deed in 1849, all that was still about 7 years in the future. Incidentally, though the deed bears the date Sept. 6, 1849 it wasn’t registered at the court house until Feb. 13, 1868.

<sup>4</sup> Ophelia Cope Daniels, “The Formative Years of Johnson City, Tennessee, 1885-1890: A Social History” (M.S. Thesis, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College, August 1947), 63, citing the unpublished autobiography of Horace Leftwich. Range’s own wording of his intention in selling it, in the deed of conveyance, was that the plot was for the purpose of “...building a school house which is also Designed for a meeting House in which all Denominations have the right to Preach....”

<sup>5</sup> Peter Range did keep some control over the property, though: His deed goes on to name himself and James Hunt and John H. Bowman as “Trustees of the House” with “full authority to regulate the Days and time of Preaching so as not to interfere with school hours ... and not to suffer the said House to be used for any other purpose than a School House and House for the Worship of God.”

<sup>6</sup> Ray Stahl, *Greater Johnson City, A Pictorial History* (Norfolk/Virginia Beach: Donning Company, 1983), 49; Judith Haws Hash, “Presbyterian,” *History of Washington County Tennessee 1988* (Watauga Association of Genealogists, 1988), 84, cf. p. 571.

<sup>7</sup> Sidney Smallwood, “A History of Education in Washington County,” *History of Washington County Tennessee 1988* (Watauga Association of Genealogists, 1988), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Daniels, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> Smallwood, p. 65; cf. Irwin, p. 522. Already in 1866 it was chartered as the Science Hill Male and Female Institute, Irwin, p. 525, though he prematurely calls it the Science Hill Male and Female High School there.

<sup>10</sup> Daniels, p. 53, from her personal interview with Heiskell Dyer; Smallwood, 65.

<sup>11</sup> Once again, see Washington County TNGenWeb, <http://tngenweb.org/washington/records-data/cemeteries/cemeteries-of-washington-county-tennessee>, s.v. Roan Hill Cemetery.

<sup>12</sup> West Lawn Cemetery was doubled in size in this transaction by adding to it the property on its southeast end which had up until then been “the Washington County Negro Industrial Association (otherwise here: School) property” but had not been used for such a school. Deed Book 161, pp. 210, 211, 212.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Compare Deed Book 161, pp. 177-178 and 210-213.

<sup>14</sup> Address as noted, for example, in the 1935 Johnson City city directory, p. 380.

<sup>15</sup> Construction on the building began in late August of 1893, and the school opened in late November of that year. *The Comet*, Johnson City, Tennessee, Thursday, August 31, 1893, page [5], column 2, and Thursday, December 7, 1893, page 5, column 2; also *The Langston Voice* (1909), pp. [5 & 6]. Taken at face value, of course, “On last Monday” in the Thursday, December 7, issue of *The Comet* would date the opening of the school to December 4. But that has to be one week too late because the account in *The Langston Voice* places the event in November, as does an account by Julia N. Hankal, “Colored School System Grows,” *Johnson City Press-Chronicle* (November 16, 1941): page 5, column 4. Ms. Hankal was a student in that school when it opened. So surely Nov. 27, 1893 is the correct date. Probably for some reason the report of the opening of the school failed to make it into *The Comet* of Thursday, Nov. 30, and appeared only a week later, without anyone noticing the need to update the wording “On last Monday....”

<sup>16</sup> The 1903 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Johnson City, Sheet 12, shows two tiny structures along the back line of the school’s lot, along the alley there. These must surely be outdoor toilets. They are missing on the next Sanborn map, from 1908, Sheet 11, and on every Sanborn map thereafter, though other structures appear along that lot line later, including a considerably larger “shed” in 1913, Sheet 11, which is then labeled “Broom Factory” in 1920, Sheet 5. After that, starting in 1927, Sheet 5, this structure is gone and the much larger structure of the “Auditorium” extends all the way back to the alley in that space. But the disappearance of the outhouses after 1903 must surely confirm that the doubling of the size of the school’s original building included adding indoor toilets.

<sup>17</sup> Possibly weighing against a date as early as 1902 or 1903 for the expansion is that that expansion doesn’t appear on the 1903 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Even worse, it doesn’t even appear yet on the Sanborn map of December 1908! Indeed, not until the 1913 map. Yet the photo of the class of 1908 in front of the building includes it, and that

photo must have been taken around early May of 1908. (Note the early leaves on all the trees.) This would not be the only evidence suggesting that the makers of the Sanborn maps weren't always on top of the latest information for their maps. Of course, such oversights can probably be excused under an assumption that preparing their maps took a lot of time, perhaps many weeks or even longer, maybe sometimes working in installments over time.

<sup>18</sup> The 1948 and 1961-3 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps wrongly date the auditorium's construction to 1920 even though the 1920 Sanborn map shows nothing there. Their 1927 and 1948 and 1961 maps do show it there. Two obscure sources do cast doubt on the 1925 date, though:

Hidden away in a copy of a typewritten "Questionnaire Pertaining to Tennessee Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1983-84" in possession of the Johnson City Board of Education is this note pertaining to Langston School: "Additions in 1922 & 1956." It doesn't mention 1925 – or 1930 either. This raises problems. Although we know the original structure was torn down and replaced (i.e. by a new addition) in 1956, we know of no addition in 1922. So does this mean the auditorium was actually added in 1922 rather than in 1925? Is this intended as a direct contradiction to the 1925 date over its entrance? Or is it just plain wrong? After all, if 1922 is right for the auditorium, why does this source fail to mention the well attested 1930 addition, the gym? Doesn't that cast doubt on this date for the auditorium?

The other obscure source is an April 27, 1921 bid of \$9990.27 from J.G. Harwood & Co., Building Contractors, to construct something (not specified) at "the Colored High School building." It's in the form of a short letter addressed to Mayor W.B. Ellison, preserved in the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University among its City of Johnson City Records, Box 22, Folder 5 (Contracts and Agreements, School Building Construction). This was no small job, like adding a porch or vestibule or rest rooms or cloak rooms. Even in 1921 dollars this was a sizeable sum of money. It's very nearly twice the amount that Harwood bid in a similar letter of the same date (which comes up later here) to construct an addition to Dunbar School. This obviously must have been Langston's auditorium. So must we assume that the city received bids on the auditorium in 1921 but delayed constructing it until 1925? Or that it did indeed construct it sometime around 1922, and that "1925" over its entrance means something else? I don't know.

<sup>19</sup> Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, vertical file "City of Johnson City Records," Box 22, Folder 5. For a proposal from C.G. Mitchell, Architect, for a contract between him and Johnson City for Mitchell to design a new brick gymnasium for "Langsten [*sic*] Col. School building" dated March 14, 1930 see City of Johnson City Records, Box 22, Folder 5 (Contracts and Agreements, School Building Construction), Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee. This proposal further specifies that Mitchell is to "superintend the Erection and Completion of the building" and certifies that the city accepts the proposal. The 1948 and 1961-3 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps also agree that the gymnasium was built in 1930. (On the whole, however, those maps are not very trustworthy for construction dates. They are wildly wrong, for example, about when the first two units of Langston High School were built.)

<sup>20</sup> See for example "Langston, Dunbar School Projects Are Under Way," *Johnson City Press-Chronicle*, June 17, 1956, Section B, Page 7.

<sup>21</sup> The 1903 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map labels it simply "Langston School" and adds two notes: "Heat: Stoves" and "No Lights." Instead, the 1908 map notes "Heat: Hot Air," so the building must have had a coal furnace by then. That map also adds a diagrammed fire escape on the building's southwest side, a feature that can be seen in the photo from around 1905 or 1906. The 1908 map labels the building "Langston Public School (Negro)," as do the 1913 and 1920 maps. The 1927 map labels it "Langston Public School (Colored)." Surprisingly, not until the 1948 map is it labeled "Langston High School (Colored)."

<sup>22</sup> Alexander, 75; Smallwood, "A History," 66; cf. Julia N. Hankal, "Colored School System Grows," *Johnson City Press-Chronicle* (November 16, 1941): page 5, column 4.

<sup>23</sup> Hankal, "Colored School System Grows."

<sup>24</sup> 1923-1924 Johnson City city directory, p. 463; 1928 city directory, p. 515.

<sup>25</sup> *Langston Aerial*, Commencement Number, 1931, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> *The Langston Voice* (1909), p. [39].

<sup>27</sup> Alexander, p. 69, indicates that the school's name was changed to Dunbar the same year it opened [1907], But this seems unlikely, since the 1909 *Langston Voice* still calls it the Woolwine School repeatedly – pp. [3, 5, 7, 23, 25]. Beginning two years later the Langston annuals consistently call it the Dunbar School – in 1911, pp. 18 & 23; in 1912, pp. [5, 20, 21]; in the combined 1914-1915 annual, pp. [1, 7, 9, 14 and on the cover], and so on. If therefore the name Dunbar was adopted sometime around 1909 to 1911, a logical guess would be "about 1910." And this is also the date and wording adopted by Ned L. Irwin in "Education," *History of Washington County Tennessee*, ed. Joyce and W. Eugene Cox (Johnson City, Tennessee: The Overmountain Press, 2001), 532.

<sup>28</sup> *The Langston Voice* (1909), p. [25]. Note the newly planted extremely young tree.

<sup>29</sup> Washington County Register of Deeds office, Deed Book 92, pp. 21-22.

<sup>30</sup> For Janes Construction Company's bids to construct "additions to school buildings and new colored school" including "PROPOSED ADDITION TO DUNBAR SCHOOL BUILDING" dated April 27, 1921, and for a losing bid from J.G. Harwood & Co. of the same date, as well as for the Contract and an Indemnity Bond between Johnson City and Janes Construction Company for the construction of "an addition to the Dunbar School building," both dated August 17, 1921, see City of Johnson City Records, Box 22, Folder 5 (Contracts and Agreements, School Building Construction), Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

<sup>31</sup> "Langston, Dunbar School Projects Are Under Way," *Johnson City Press-Chronicle*, June 17, 1956, Section B, Page 7.

<sup>32</sup> 1928 Johnson City city directory, p. 515; 1935 city directory, p. 380.

<sup>33</sup> It's dated 1922 on its bronze dedication plaque. Cf. Alexander, p. 74. For the Janes Construction Company's signed agreement to construct "additions to school buildings and new colored school," "PROPOSED COLORED SCHOOL" [it became Douglass School], dated April 27, 1921, see City of Johnson City Records, Box 22, Folder 5 (Contracts and Agreements, School Building Construction), Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

<sup>34</sup> According to Montie Rhea, who remembers the outside of the building but never attended school there. Rather, he went to Dunbar School.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander, 74-75: "According to the Minutes of the Johnson City Board of Education dated November 8, 1923, approximately 30 black elementary-age children in the Roan Hill section of town were in need of a place of learning. Due to the distant location of both black elementary schools, the City Board of Education Building Committee's report requested the appropriation of roughly \$2,500.00 to construct a two-room school building in that area. No action was taken until 1925. ¶ The solution to the Roan Hill education problem came from one of the area's black residents. James Brown met with the Board of Education on October 2, 1925; that meeting resulted in the city's modest renovation of James Brown's cottage for use by Roan Hill's elementary age children."

<sup>36</sup> As it happens, a copy of a typewritten mimeographed program of "ANNUAL SERVICES" in Langston Auditorium on Sunday afternoon, May, 21, 1939, survives, and at its end is an announcement of the "Roan Hill School Operetta" to be staged in Langston Auditorium the next day, May 22, at 8:15 P.M. According to Mary Henderson Alexander these operettas were the exercises performed at the end of the school year by the children of the Black elementary schools back then.

<sup>37</sup> It appears that the situation was actually more complicated than that. Most of my information is from a Sept. 21, 1980 research paper that I once saw, written for a graduate level history course at East Tennessee State University by Harold G. Handy – including that this school opened in the fall of 1925, closed in 1941, and included only grades 1 through 4. Maybe that paper is in the Archives of Appalachia. Handy narrates that on Oct. 2, 1925 the Board of Education met "at the residence of Jim Brown, a black resident" on Roan Hill. (I understand that Brown had been pressing the Board to open an elementary school on Roan Hill to serve the Black children of that area.) The members of the Board "decided to open a school at the Jim Brown cottage with some repairs, as soon as possible. It is not known whether the cottage was purchased by the city or whether Jim Brown gave the cottage to the city."

Handy documented no source for his information, but one might surmise (from what he said on p. 3, including note 4 there) that it came from the minute book of the Johnson City Board of Education, minutes for Oct. 2, 1925 and possibly for other meetings later that year. Alas, I've been told that the Board's minutes for all years until much later than 1925 were destroyed long ago. Might evidence of these particulars yet be found by combing through issues of Johnson City newspapers from that era?

It's not known how soon after Oct. 2, 1925 the Board was able to open this Roan Hill School – in other words, how soon the repairs to that building were completed and how long it took the Board to hire or possibly transfer at least one teacher to teach 4 grades in it. Or did the Board change plans and open this school in a different building instead? Read on.

If this school first opened in Jim Brown's refurbished "cottage," where was that located? City directories of that era show more than one James Brown or Jas. Brown living in this neighborhood. We can discount one who lived at 337 Magnolia Ave. in 1928 and 1930-1931 because he wasn't "colored." But a Black person named Jas. Brown lived at 334 [W.] Grand(e) Ave. in 1923-1924, and 330 Grande Ave. was vacant that year. These were the very years that Jim Brown was pressing the Board of Education to create an elementary school for the Black children who lived in the Roan Hill neighborhood. Might this man on Grande Ave. be the right Jim Brown? Might there have been a "cottage" two doors away from him at 330 Grande Ave. and might he have owned it? If so, possibly that was the building that was refurbished to serve as a Black elementary school.

No James Brown lived at 334 W. Grande Ave. in any later city directory from that period. In 1923-1924, another Black person named Jas. Brown and a Fletcher Brown both lived at 322 Magnolia Ave.. (Possibly brothers,

or father and son?) Could this be the same Jas. Brown who also lived on Grande Ave. at the same time (or did he maybe at least own an interest in both properties then), rather than a different Jas. Brown? (Keep in mind too that city directories are by no means free of errors. One can even find disclaimers about accuracy in them, e.g. in 1928, p. 471.) Jas. Brown still lived at 322 Magnolia in 1928. I can't find a Black person named Jas. Brown anywhere in the 1930-1931 or 1935 city directories, but this Jas. Brown (sometimes listed as Jas. E. Brown) was still at 322 Magnolia in 1937 and 1939 and 1941 and 1944. So then, did Jim Brown move from 334 Grande Ave. to (his other house?) at 322 Magnolia after the new Roan Hill School opened in 1925 or 1926 and before information was collected for the 1928 city directory? That possibility might explain some things for us. Read on.

<sup>38</sup> Some traditions locate the second Roan Hill School at 330 W. Grand(e) Ave. Both the 1928 Johnson City city directory (pp. 338, 471, 515) and the 1930-1931 city directory (p. 514) locate it there. (It is not listed yet in the 1923-1924 city directory. It didn't exist yet then.) But this address seems to be wrong. Indeed, inconsistently the same 1930 city directory also lists the Roan Hill School on a different page (p. 461) at 338 W. Highland Rd. After 1930 the city directories list it only at 338 W. Highland Rd.: in 1935 (p. 380), in 1937 (pp. 302 & 380), in 1939 (pp. 530 & 653), and in 1941 (pp. 433 & 574). (The Roan Hill School no longer appears in the 1944 directory. It's absent from pp. 531 & 656 there where it would logically have appeared. By 1944 the school no longer existed.)

I have not encountered any tradition that this school ever changed locations, and the possibility that it moved from Grande Ave. to Highland Rd. around 1930 is pretty well ruled out by a map of Johnson City dated September 1928 which clearly shows "Roan Hill School" already that year on the northeast corner (actually the north corner) of W. Highland Rd. and Knox St.

But does the presence of the aforementioned Jas. Brown on Grande Ave. in 1923-1924 and the aforementioned Jas. Brown on Magnolia in 1923-1924 and 1928 suggest the possibly these two were the same Jas. Brown, that he moved to Magnolia before 1928, and maybe that the school had moved to Highland Rd. by 1928? Possibly even right at the outset or soon after? Indeed, did the city ever go ahead and refurbish Mr. Brown's cottage and occupy it, whether it was on Grande Ave. or somewhere else? Perhaps the Board of Education found a more suitable facility on Highland before ever remodeling a cottage and before opening the school. Or perhaps the building at 338 W. Highland Rd. was Mr. Brown's cottage. As previously noted, city directories are by no means free of errors.

I know of no tradition that the Board built the schoolhouse at 338 W. Highland Rd. So maybe the Board acquired an already existing home there to house this school, in place of Jim Brown's cottage. If so, it too might have needed some repairs. Conceivably, given the possible parallels between the two structures, some of the memories about repairing Mr. Brown's cottage might have been true of a house on Highland instead – might have been transferred in someone's mind, by confusion, to the structure on Highland Rd. Or if Mr. Brown's cottage did house the school for a couple of years before 1928, a parallel process of refurbishing might have been done at both structures.

Regrettably, too few clear memories of details like these have survived to allow us to reach clarity about exactly how it all came about.

<sup>39</sup> This block of W. Highland Rd. was eliminated in 1964 as part of the city's urban renewal project in the Roan Hill area. In fact, before 1964 W. Highland Rd. continued northeast all the way to Buffalo St.