

THE DUNBAR HIGH SCHOOL STORY!!

(Documented and Eyewitnessed Accounts)

Certain information and statements made during a program of Dedication of the Dunbar High School Monument, Memorial Sunday, May 24, 1981, were misleading and raised a number of questions of concern among former eye-witness students who entered Dunbar High School at its beginning, 12 February 1923. For instance, information that the first faculty at Dunbar High School consisted of mostly "white" teachers was not correct and that the books supplied by Jones Memorial Library "were old, discarded books". That statement was not only exaggerated, it was false! There were other references made that were not conducive, common or complete in facts. This is the history of an era, of a people within an institution, and such a presentation must be recorded and documented by factual information.

Professor J. Lee Greene, University of North Carolina, in *Times' Unfading Garden*, the life and poetry of Anne Spencer's biography relates:

"... Mrs. Spencer, I suspect, immersed herself more deeply into reading and writing, during the decade following Edward's (her husband's) death in 1964 than at any similar period in her life. If what is available of her notes is any indication of her thought process during this period, her 'mind brooded in history', especially on the 'peculiar institution' of American slavery. Though some of the 'scribblings on history and slavery' date back as far as the 1920's this interest intensified during the last decade of her life. And for the first time in her life she was much more interested in writing prose than poetry ... She recorded:

'When history books tell no lies at all, they will be read even less than they are read today. The readers mind - if so - must amalgamate, or reverse the terms of the divisor and proceed as in multiplication - if I recall what the most earnest teacher said to my nitwithead way back in the nineteenth century. He even tried to explain why. The only part of it I did get was ME. He said every result that could be proved was a fact. And there I was. Today in the twentieth century here I am. Here, Mr. Du Bois' . . . 'Humanity is divided thru the middle into true and false liars. Only those people are true liars who will tell a lie where one is not called for'.

"Anne Spencer records that in the main our historians have obscured history with a conglomeration of meaningless 'facts': History books of men and events must of course be dated by the year of a certain act or action, by the day on which it happened. Even at times by the fact on the clock. But while history is not necessarily the complete truth, truth is an important part of history and needs no date. To be sure Anne Spencer is not singular among writers in seeing the records of history as lie, distortion, evasion; for as Ralph Ellison states in *The Invisible Man*, 'History records the patterns of men's lives, they say: Who slept with whom and with what results; who fought and who won and who lived to lie about it afterwards . . . those lies his keepers keep their power by. Mrs. Spencer noted: 'My country is having a hard and agonizing time: whenever any hierocracy seeks stabilizing greatness for itself, it writes an open-eyed invitation to the enemies of its own creation. Some of the notations on this subject are more specific and deal with the love-hate relationship Anne Spencer saw between blacks and whites in this country: When Lee and Grant shook hands in the parlor of McLean House April 9, 1865, they became brothers again, 'Making up'. But they and their siblings were much less brother and sister than four millions of enslaved people came, tentatively, into their bondage. The blacks, the shepherd checks, and whites - we were all there and we all had this unique kinship. The separation came gradually. The divorce has never been conceded on either side. We are saturated with memories of each other, making us both reluctant to let go. This I think is love - and often it is psychologically, love raised to the point of hatred."

Professor J. Lee Greene wrote, in a personal copy of *"Times' Unfading Garden*, "Chauncey, I knew you before I met you, and your mother was right - you were 'impossible'. But, as she said, it's the 'impossible' people who help make things possible . . ."

It was some of the "impossible" and incorrect information presented, regarding the Dunbar Story (which included Anne Spencer), that urged me to extract J. Lee Greene's statement regarding Anne Spencer's reference to history.

I herewith present personal accounts and eyewitness information in chronological order of "colored" schools in Lynchburg, Virginia:

My father, Edward Alexander Spencer, stated that Jacob E. Yoder, a Quaker from Pennsylvania, started the first school for "colored" in "The Tru-Reformers Hall" building in 1871 (603 Grace Street), at the corner of Grace and Maidson Streets. My father began his education there in 1884. As the enrollment increased, they moved into the "Old Monroe" building, formerly a school for "Whites", on the corners of 12th and Harrison and Salem and Harrison Streets. (The first "kinder-garten" school was privately sponsored by the Good Shepherd Church, on the corner of Wise and 14th Streets - 1911). The "Polk Street" School (The Old Chicken Coop) between 9th and 10th on Polk Street. The first "Payne School" on the corner of 12th and Polk Streets. "Jackson Street High School" - 823 Jackson Street and "Yoder" School (named in honor of Jacob Eschbach Yoder) - 207 Jackson Street, Dunbar High School, named in honor of the Poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar. (Jackson High School was a 10th grade school, 3-year high school until 1920-1921).

DUNBAR HIGH SCHOOL

Lynchburg High School (for whites) was built in 1911. In 1920, the name was changed to E. C. Glass, in honor of Edwin C. Glass, the superintendent. It was located on Park Avenue between 7th and 8th Streets. In that same year (1920), a group of Lynchburg citizens formed an organization known as "The Common-Wheel Alliance." They met with the members of the School Board and the five-man City Council with petitions requesting the replacing of White teachers with Negro teachers, and building a new high school for their children.

The teachers at Jackson High School (white) were:

Miss Helen D. Urquhart - Principal	
Miss Ossie Dameron	Miss Dorothy Conrad
Miss Elizabeth Glass	Miss Mary Percy

Members of the School Board took no action; nor did the City Council. The petitions were "noted and files".

Some of the members of "The Common-Wheel Alliance" were:

Rev. Lloyd Overton Lewis	Dr. H. P. Weeden
Edward A. Bondurant	Dr. Thomas J. Fawcett
Prof. Colston Stewart, Sr.	John C. Fisher
A. G. Langhorne, Sr.	H.A.M. Johns
Dr. Frank Trigg	Washington Scott
Vivian Trigg	Dr. Kyle M. Pettis
Edward A. Spencer	Mary Rice Hayes
Annie B. Spencer	Amelia Pride

David T. Johnson, Sr.
Rowena White
Hugh White
Alphonzo Humbles
Celindia Humbles

Prof. Ulysses Patterson

Samuel H. Pinn
Prince A. Gordon, Sr.
Frances Cox
Hattie V. Scott
J. B. Evans, Sr.
Warrick Anderson, Sr.

These members of the Alliance continued to press the Council and School Board for a new high school and teachers. During this time, the Catholic Church and school was then on the site on Polk Street at the corner of 12th. There was also a Catholic school adjoining the church (the parish was directly across 12th Street from the church, where it is now). The Catholic school began allowing colored and white students to attend their school. The City Council and the School Board members quickly agreed to purchase the land from the church and to build a new colored high school. They also agreed to replace the white teachers.

The Negro faculty members began teaching at "Old Jackson High School" in September, 1922. They were:

Prof. W. F. DeBardleben, Principal	Charlotta A. Peters
Prof. Jefferson Grisby	Ora S. Williams
Rev. John A. Davis	Helen D. Urquhart (white), Supervising Principal

The Catholic Church and school were demolished. Construction of the new high school began 1921-1922.

The dedication ceremony was held in June, 1922; the school was named Dunbar High School, and the cornerstone was laid. Dr. I. Garland Penn was the speaker. (Dr. Penn was a teacher in the Lynchburg Public Schools in 1887, appointed Principal in 1888, and was an Editor, Writer and Orator - *see footnote 1*).

On the morning of 12 February 1923, the entire faculty and student body left Jackson Street High School and marched up from 9th and Jackson to the newly-completed Dunbar High School (12th and Polk Streets), and later joining the Jackson High faculty were:

Prof. Wiley O. Thompson	Mrs. Fannie S. Womack
Mrs. Amy P. Jordan	Miss Dorothy Lomax
Prof. J. A. Jordan	Mr. Norvel O. White
Mr. James Mozee	Miss Amaza L. Meredith
Mrs. Clara Majors-Seay	Mr. Wyatt Clements (Custodian)

A four (4) year high school course began at "Old Jackson Street High School" in the September, 1920 term.

The first class to graduate from the new Dunbar High School was the Class of February and June 1923 - they were:

Frank Pondexter Lewis - President	
Oriana Boundurant	Anna Johnson
Alfred Campbell	George Pannell
Dillie Coleman	Herman Penn
Edna Cox	Mabel Pride
Pearl Evans	Fannie Scott
Ruth Glass	Elizabeth Turner
Lucille Harris	Alice White

The Baccalaureate Services were held at the Jackson Street Methodist Church (9th and Jackson Streets), Rev. Paul Hamilton Haynes was the speaker - 10 June 1923.

The Commencement Ceremonies were held at the (Lynchburg) City Auditorium (over the City Market) - 1114 Main Street - at 7:30 P.M., 15 June 1923. Dr. John Manual Gandy (President of Virginia State College - Ettricks, Virginia, 1914 to 1942) delivered the Commencement address.

The School Colors, selected by the student body, were purple and old gold.

In 1921, 1922 and 1923, the Jackson High School - Dunbar High School basketball teams played their games in the Fox Hall Auditorium at the Virginia Theological Seminary and College.

In 1924, the first "Dunbar football team" was made of Dunbar students and non-Dunbar students. It was organized by Hershey Steptoe and William "Bill" Chafin, two members of the Virginia Theological Seminary and College, who volunteered their services as coaches. Football suits, helmets, shoes, etc. were donated by Coach Edward "Ed" Hurt, head coach at the Virginia Theological Seminary and College and S. O. Fisher, Inc., 1024 Main Street; and, through the efforts of Benjamin "Ben" Scott, Dr. Harry W. Reid, Dr. H. P. Weeden, Dr. T. J. Fawcett, Ed Hurt and others, the team was furnished hooded capes for weather protection.

In 1925, the "Dunbar Team" played their first game against Bedford City Training School. John Edley and Son, Movers, 708-710 Fifth Street, provided the transportation. James Chafin was the quarterback. The first (unpaid) coach of Dunbar High School football team was Mr. C. W. Seay.

In 1925, the Lynchburg Recreation Department sponsored the first Dunbar Track meet at the "City Fairgrounds" (now Lynchburg Stadium). S. O. Fisher, Inc., 1024 Main Street, furnished the trophies and medals. George E. "Zeke" Hughes won top athlete honors.

Mrs. John Armistead and Mr. Turner (both white) were on the Dunbar faculty as visiting music instructors.

NOTES:

1. *Dr. Irvine Garland Penn was born in the year 1867, in New Glasgow, Amherst County, Virginia. His parents, Isham and Mariah Penn, were fully aware of superior advantages of public school training and moved to Lynchburg with their children when Irvine was five years old. He passed with success through primary and grammar schools and in 1882 entered the junior class of high school. He taught school in Bedford County, Virginia. In 1887, he was elected as a teacher in the public schools of Lynchburg and in a short time, arose to the position of principal. He was the part owner and editor of The Lynchburg Laborer. He was a fluent speaker, and was considered a literary genius.*

2. *From: "Minute Book - Jones Memorial Library"*
Regular monthly meeting held at Krise Building, Lynchburg at 12:00 o'clock M, March 13th, 1923. The following members being present. Messrs. E. C. Glass, J. R. Gilliam, Jr., R. T. Watts Jr., and A. R. Long, - and Librarian (J. Maude Campbell) and Secretary. The minutes of the meeting held February 15th, 1923 ...

"... On motion of Mr. Glass, duly seconded, the President of the Library Board was directed to propose to the School Board the establishment of a library in the new colored high school building, with the understanding that room, book-shelves, heat, light and janitors service be supplied by the School Board, and that the furniture, books and librarian be supplied by the Jones Library Board."

NOTES:

2. (continued)

November 9, 1923

"... On motion, Miss Campbell was authorized to employ a librarian from Louisville Library Training School to open the library at the Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School and train a librarian for the school library."

January 14th, 1924

"On motion duly seconded the salaries of the following employees of the library were fixed at the amounts shown below, effective as of January 1st 1924 ... Mrs. Anne Spencer, Librarian, Dunbar School, \$840.00 a year."

February 19th, 1924

"The minutes of the meeting held January 14, 1924 were read and approved.

"Dunbar Branch (open 17 days):

(new books) Fiction 1,059 Vols.

(new books) Non-Fiction 198 Vols."

December 14th, 1926

"Dunbar Branch:

Adult Fiction 741 Vols.

Adult Non-Fiction 275 Vols.

Juvenile Fiction 970 Vols.

Juvenile Non-Fiction 285 Vols.

285 new members registered."

The minutes, Pages 61 thru 192½, established that from the beginning of Paul Lawrence Dunbar Branch Library - November 9, 1923 to January 13, 1930 - The Lynchburg Advance reported ... The Dunbar Branch circulated 73% fiction, literature 5% and history 3%. A total of 16,813 volumes were circulated in 1926 and had 1,522 card holders.

(Due to the fact that "The Dunbar Story" presentation states "the Dunbar Branch only received discarded books from Jones Memorial Library", the writer explained the above-documented information regarding The Dunbar Branch Library.)

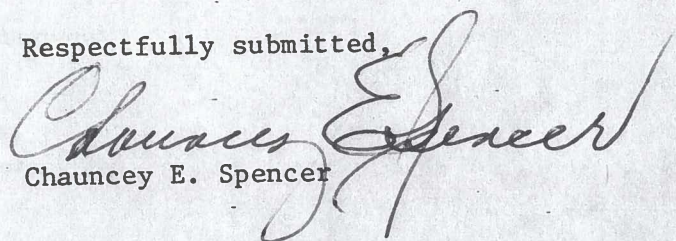
NOTES:

3. There were many contributors and supporters of the information submitted herewith. Credit and appreciation is expressed for their time and support:

Prof. C. W. Seay	Prof. J. Lee Greene
Miss Sarah Hickson - Director, Jones Memorial Library, and her staff	
John C. Fisher	Mrs. Ophelia S. Fisher
Mrs. Cordelia Davis-Pinn	Rev. Frank P. Lewis
Frank Hughes	Mrs. Thelma Hughes
George Pannell	Miss Amaza L. Meredith
Administrators - Virginia State College - Petersburg, Virginia (now University)	
Mrs. Amy P. Jordan	Miss Dorothy Lomax
Mrs. Elvira Jackson deFreitas	Mrs. Victoria Martin Stamps
Mrs. Elizabeth Long-Hughes	Mrs. Debbie Snidow, Lynchburg School Administration
Ronald H. LaReau, Lynchburg School Administration Liaison	
Prof. William "Pop" Payne	Clarence Minor
William E. Gordon (deceased)	George C. Grimes
and Many Others	

4. It is also noted that the use of "Black" in the film presentation of The Dunbar Story is used frequently in referring to racial identity. This reference was not of common practice during the years 1920 - 1940 in the "Dunbar era" history.

Respectfully submitted,


Chauncey E. Spencer