

LUNENBURG'S PUBLIC EDUCATION HISTORY FROM 1870 – 1970

"The public sentiment in the county is largely in favor of public free schools." -Robert Miles Williams

Have you ever had questions about public education in Lunenburg County such as: 1) When did public education begin? 2) Who were the superintendents and other school leaders? 3) What were schools like years ago?

In Virginia, William Henry Ruffner, Superintendent of Public Instruction, designed a statewide system of racially segregated schools in 1870. The General Assembly decreed that there would be a *"uniform system of public free schools"* in all counties of the state by 1876. The state's overall school age population was growing and the establishment of segregated schools increased in Lunenburg County, too. There were only four schools on the list in a county promotion in 1870: Cedar Hill in Plantersville, Lochleven Seminary, Moss Hill in Roxton, and Miss Mattie C. Stokes' School at Whittle's Mill.

Robert Miles Williams, of Victoria, was Lunenburg's first school superintendent in 1871. The next year, Williams gave his first report to the Virginia State Board of Education on the initiation of public education in the county. Williams stated, *"The public sentiment in the county is largely in favor of public free schools. The name of nearly every family in the county is on the school rolls. But there is shown some opposition to raising funds for their support."* Other schools established in the late 1800s included Lunenburg, Smith, Robertson, Ledbetter, Reedy, Bagley, Wood Park, Hite, and a school at Walker Grange Hall, Victoria, and Kenbridge. Schools established for African Americans were Trinity, Denkins Town, Morton, Tussekiah, Roaches, and Henry May in 1971; and thirty other schools were established between 1872 and 1899.

The earlier schools were constructed of wood planks or logs sometimes chinked with mud or cement. They had no running water, electricity, indoor restrooms or cafeteria. Many of the children walked to and from school (up to two miles or more) because there was no bus for transportation. A single teacher taught reading, writing, and arithmetic to students from the primer to upper elementary level. The school term was about five months. A potbelly stove like the one in the drawing was typical of how schools were heated on cold, wintry days. Some of the male students would sometime gather small tree branches to help make a fire. Oftentimes, patrons cut trees and brought a supply of wood or coal to the school. The teacher also used the stove to cook a pot of beans or soup for the children to eat at lunchtime. In some rural schools, a batch of homemade candy treats was given to the children on Fridays. School patrons often donated or purchased all of the land, contributed the materials, equipment, construction work, and paid teachers' salaries from private funds. Many schools were named in honor of the person who donated the land. Some schooling took place in the church, and later members constructed schools on the church site for which the school was named.



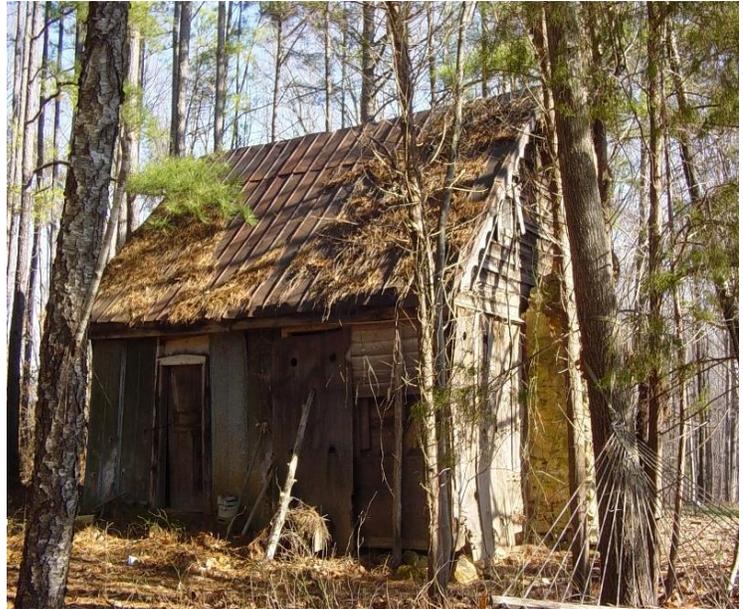
2011 by Shirley R. Lee

Below are photos of earlier schools:

HITE SCHOOL

After the Hollydale School at this site was destroyed by fire in the 1880s, a small, frame building with decorative eaves was constructed as its replacement. The Hite School, now unoccupied, is situated in a patch of woods on the east side of South Hill Road (#138) between St. John's Church Road (#612) and Hinkle Road (#611.)

Coordinates: N36.826400 W78.084694



2007 photo courtesy of June Banks Evans



2011 photo by Shirley R. Lee

ROBERTSON SCHOOL

The Robertson School still stands on Moores Ordinary Road approximately five miles northeast of Kenbridge. This frame structure is believed to be among the first schools constructed in the late 1800s. The school was named after Jack Robertson, a farmer, who owned the land. It closed around 1915 or 1916, and consolidated with the Woodrow School located on nearby Jonesboro Road.

UNITY SCHOOL

The Unity School was originally established in 1873 through the united efforts of Robert Harris, Joseph Gee, Banister Lee, and William Crawley. The school, named after Unity Baptist Church, was erected on the church site. This building was destroyed by fire in the late 1930s, and another frame school was constructed in the early 1940s. The reconstructed school still stands on the original site located on Craig Mill Road, approximately five miles south of Kenbridge.



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By the late 1890s laws were put into effect, especially in the southern states, that created separate public places such as restaurants, railroad cars, toilets—segregated everything in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Before the desegregation of public education in the late 1960s, there were differences in the availability of school transportation, teacher’s salaries, educational facilities, and other resources.

*Look for more information about the school system in Lunenburg County during the next marking period.

Selected Sources: *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Commonwealth of Virginia*, Virginia State Board of Education, (1871, 1872, 1881); Mary C. Pulley, *History of Lunenburg County in World War II*, (1949); *A History of Public Education in Virginia*, Virginia Department of Education, (2003); Ronald L. Heinemann, John G. Kolp, Anthony S. Parent, Jr., and William G. Shade, *Old Dominion ~ New Commonwealth*, (2007); Gay W. Neale, *The Lunenburg Legacy*, (2005); Oscar Wood, *Development of Education for Negroes in Lunenburg County, Virginia 1870-1952* (1953); Anne C. Hamlett and Stephen S. Israel, *Victoria - Then and Now, The Centennial Edition, 1909-2009*, (2009); *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163, U.S. 537 (1896); *Our Town*, October 29, 1983.

(NOTE: This review is based on available information and may not include all facts related to the public education in Lunenburg County from 1870 to 1970.)