

FAIRFAX COUNTY

VIRGINIA

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Fairfax County Public Schools at the turn of the 20th Century

School looked a lot different in 1890 than it does today. Until Virginia's new constitution was passed in 1869, there was no public-school program. The first statewide school system was created by the Freedmen's Bureau for African American children. Prior to this, wealthy white Virginians had their children educated by tutors, so most kids had no formal education. There were laws preventing the education of African Americans, whether free or enslaved.

merita.

1861-2, p. 37,
c. 40.

Sec. 1492. Who admitted to public schools; provision for children of adjoining districts; separate schools for white and colored.—The public free schools shall be free to all persons between the ages of five and twenty-one years, residing within the school district; and the Board of Education shall have power, and it shall be its duty, to make regulations whereby the children of one district may attend school in an adjoining district, either in or out of the county, and the cost of their tuition be drawn from the funds pertaining to the district wherein they reside, in cases where no school has been located and opened in the district in which the said children reside and sufficiently near for them to attend the same, or if located and opened, some unavoidable hindrance prevents their attendance: *Provided*, that white and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school, but in separate schools, under the same general regulations as to management, usefulness, and efficiency.

By the end of the 19th century there was a more formalized system, but organization varied widely by county. In Fairfax County, schools were separated into separate districts with several schools under each district. We have records from the following school districts: Lee, Falls Church, Providence, Mount Vernon, and Dranesville. There was a superintendent and school board for the whole county.

Compulsory school attendance for children between eight and twelve, in order to teach students to read and write. All schools were available to those between the ages of 5 and 20, but students typically attended school for much less than that allotted time.

Sec. 1497. What to be taught in schools.—In every public free school shall be taught orthography, reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, and geography; and no other branches shall be introduced except as allowed by special regulations to be devised by the Board of Education.

Code of Virginia, 1887, Title 22, Sec. 1492

Schools operated for the most part in one room schoolhouses where teachers had to balance a variety of ages and grade levels. For it to be considered a school, there had to be a minimum of 30 students. The main focus was teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, but other subjects such as history, geography, and even hygiene were introduced for upper-level students.

Schools were segregated by race. This was specifically outlined in Virginia's Education Laws. Some of the most valuable records we have are school censuses from 1890 and 1900. They are done by district and split into sections based on race. They contain all school aged children from 5 to 20 years old, their parents or guardian, age, gender, reading/writing ability, and school attendance. It denotes if a child has a disability. Some census collectors also denoted if children were multiples. There was even a group of 14-year-old triplets!



Lee District Census 1890

Form No. 441

DISTRICT CLERK'S SUMMARY OF CENSUS RETURNS, 1890.

Mr. Vesmin School District, Fairfax County, Virginia.

(See that the Totals agree.)

GENERAL SUMMARY.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	Total
Total number White Males	24	14	15	23	18	15	21	15	21	20	17	24	13	20	17	29	301														
Total number White Females	31	23	21	18	12	14	21	21	17	23	15	21	19	14	14	42	291														
Total number White	55	37	36	41	30	29	42	36	38	43	32	45	27	34	31	36	592														
Total number Colored Males	22	6	16	16	10	14	11	19	17	12	12	11	5	9	6	4	190														
Total number Colored Females	21	19	15	14	17	14	9	10	9	19	5	10	6	4	2	188															
Total number Colored	43	25	31	30	27	28	20	29	26	31	16	15	15	10	6	378															
Total number White and Colored	98	62	67	71	57	57	62	64	65	64	48	61	42	49	41	42	970														

SPECIAL SUMMARIES.

	White	Female
Total number White and Colored	267	243
- - - - - attend school	34	48
- - - - - do not	233	195
Total number Colored	39	55
- - - - - attend school	14	13
- - - - - do not	25	42
Total number White and Colored	137	130
- - - - - attend school	48	61
- - - - - do not	89	69

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that the facts set forth in the above summaries of census returns are just and true, to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that they were collected in strict accordance with law and the instructions given by the Department of Public Instruction of Virginia.

31 July 1890. Ruth Wiley District Clerk

NOTE.—The clerk will report in the Census Report, as a separate item, the names and addresses of all the persons who are enumerated in the census, and of the institutions, clubs, lodges, and societies, and of the places of public assembly, and of the places where the census was taken. The Department will also furnish to the clerk a copy of the instructions for the census.

Mt. Vernon District Census 1890

This information was used to determine the adequate number of schools for a district and make sure children were getting an appropriate education. Not to the standards we have today, just to make sure the children were literate. This might be helpful for genealogical research, but it can also give us important data about school attendance and literacy rates.

Here is collected data from the census records we have.

	White			Colored		
	Attendance Rate	Literacy Rate	Total Students	Attendance Rate	Literacy Rate	Total Students
Providence 1890	88%	87%	810	75%	66%	587
Lee 1890	78%	80%	597	59%	62%	116
Falls Church 1890	71%	76%	539	51%	55%	373
Falls Church 1900	N/A	82%	676	N/A	77%	499
Mt Vernon 1890	88%	85%	592	84%	74%	378

Attendance rates and literacy rates are fairly similar, but there is not one pattern that holds true for all districts. Colored children had a lower literacy rate overall, but it is inspiring to see that over the ten years from 1890 to 1900 the literacy rate improved from 55% to 77%.

Sec. 1476. Teachers to hold certificate of qualification.—No teacher of a public free school shall be employed or shall receive any pay from the public funds, unless he shall hold a certificate of qualification in full force, given to him by the county superintendent for the county within which he is employed. No such payment shall be allowed, if made, and any officer who shall make or sanction it shall also be subject to a penalty of not less than five nor more than fifty dollars.

Code of Virginia, 1887, Virginia, Title 22, Sec. 1476

Teachers were required by Virginia law to be certified and could attain different levels of certification from 1st grade through professional level. There was a good mix of male and female teachers, but similarly to today, more female teachers.

12		Record of Teachers										Examined in 1887										13	
Name	Age	Sex	Color	Residence	Grade	Time taught	County	Where born	Where raised	Where taught	Education	Class of cert.	Remarks										
Amble, G. A.	23	White	M	Single	17.00	1 yr. 11 mo.	Scott Co.	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
"	24	"	"	"	95	6. 3.	Callahan	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Kearney, J.	21	Colored	M	Married	00	6. 3.	Abbeville	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia	1st grade	None											
Aspfors, B.	26	White	M	Single	95	1 yr. 1.	Burke Co.	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
"	31	"	"	"	95	8. 8.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Anderson, W.	18	Colored	M	"	12.35	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Dyer, J. L.	17	White	M	Single	12.36	1. 7.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Head, B. W.	24	Colored	M	"	16.73	1. 6.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Bullard, J. E.	42	White	"	"	15.71	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Brady, J. R.	18	"	"	"	11.51	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Bell, J. W.	37	Colored	M	"	19.41	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Dunkard, J.	21	"	"	"	16.21	3. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Brickley, W.	21	White	M	Single	16.12	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Dickley, J. P.	35	"	"	"	16.27	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Dickley, G. A.	19	"	"	"	12.31	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Dickley, A.	25	Colored	"	"	16.46	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Davis, J. W.	33	White	M	Single	15.11	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Chapman, J.	27	"	"	"	15.11	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Chapman, B.	31	"	"	"	12.91	3. 5.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Cartledge, C.	52	"	"	"	91.15	6. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Clark, J. P.	21	Colored	M	Single	19.24	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Care, L. W.	25	White	M	Single	19.45	2. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Cattell, J. S.	"	"	"	"	00.00	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Carr, J. S.	26	"	"	"	91.76	1. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											
Carr, J. S.	51	"	"	"	91.73	9. 1.	Virginia	Pa.	Pa.	Pa.	1st grade	None											

Record of Teachers Examined and Contracted with, 1887

This is a record of teachers who attempted to be certified in 1887, many of them would have been teachers for the children in the 1890 census.

Sec. 1496. Exclusion of persons with contagious diseases, or who have not been vaccinated.—Persons suffering with contagious diseases shall be excluded from the public free schools while in that condition, and the teachers shall require of the pupils cleanliness of person and good behavior during their attendance at the school and on the way thither and back to their homes; and no pupils shall be admitted unless they have been vaccinated: *Provided*, that the operation of this clause concerning vaccination may be suspended in whole or in part by the school board of any city or county.

Code of Virginia, 1887, Title 22, Sec. 1496

Even back in 1871, there was a requirement for students to be vaccinated. This did not include the variety of vaccines students are required to have today, as most of them had yet to be developed. Most likely it was just the smallpox vaccine. Physical health was important, requiring pupils to have “cleanliness of person and good behavior.” Even then, students were taught hygiene.

Like many other states, and especially other Southern states, textbooks had to be approved by the state and teachers were only allowed to use those state approved textbooks. In the Attendance books, teachers also listed what subjects the students were learning and what textbooks they used.

Not surprisingly, white and colored schools used different textbooks. White schools used newer books, while colored schools used older, outdated textbooks. This is especially problematic with history textbooks. While most students were just learning reading and writing, upper-level students learned history of both Virginia and the United States as a whole.

SUMMARY FOR THE TERM.				TEXT-BOOKS USED.		No. Used.	No. supplied at district expense.
	Boys.	Girls.	Total.				
No. pupils on the roll,	12	11	23	Merrill's	Speller,		
Average monthly enrollment,	9 1/2	10 1/2	20 1/2		Spelling Blanks,		
Average daily attendance,					Primer,		
Percentage of attendance,				Stepping Stones to English	First Reader,		
Days present,				"	Second Reader,		
Sum of ages,	150	134	284	Step by Step	Third Reader,		
Average age,	12 1/2	12 1/11	12 1/2	"	Fourth Reader,		
No. new pupils entered during month,				"	Fifth Reader,		
No. dropped during month,				"	Sixth Reader,		
No. over 21 years of age,	0	0		Graphic Systems	Copy Books,		
No. from other districts,	0	0		Venerables	Elementary Arithmetic,		
Seating capacity,	14	14	28	Venerables	Higher Arithmetic,		
No. in Spelling,				Hyde's	Elementary Grammar,		
Reading,				Whitney & Rock's	Higher Grammar,		
Writing,	12	11	23	Mansfield's	Elementary Geography,		
Arithmetic,				"	Higher Geography,		
Grammar,					History of Virginia,		
Geography,				Price's	History of United States		
History (Va.)					Civil Government,		
History (U. S.)					Physiology and Hygiene,		
Civil Government,					Drawing,		
Physiology and Hygiene,					Music,		
Drawing,				Webster's	Dictionaries,		
Music,							
Higher branches,							
No. of months school was taught,	6						
No. of days school was taught,	120						

Teacher's Register, Lee District, 1902

A white school in Lee District used Lee's History of the United States. This school taught a lot of advanced subjects because their average age was 12, which was higher than usual.

Slavery Allowed by the Constitution.—The Constitution allowed the holding of slaves as property, and Congress in 1793 declared that it had no power to interfere with it. You have seen that New England, to make money for herself, combined with South Carolina to prolong the African slave trade.

Increase of Abolitionism.—The Quakers persisted in denouncing slavery, and taught many Northern people to believe that it was contrary to the Bible. This the Southern people knew was not true, and although many of them would have been glad to see slavery come to an end, they knew that neither Congress nor the Northern people had any right to interfere between them and their slaves.

Opposition to Missouri.—When Missouri applied to be made a State there was a great disturbance. It was part of Louisiana, where slavery already existed. The Northern politicians were afraid of the South getting too much power in Congress, and they said Missouri should not come into the Union unless she gave up her slaves, and also that there should never be a slave State west of the Mississippi, which was entirely contrary to the Constitution.

Lee's Primary School History of the United States, Susan Pendleton Lee, 1897

In this textbook, the challenges against slavery were posed as a threat to the South and this textbook continually justified slavery and diminished its importance as the cause of the civil war.

them was constantly discussed in her Legislature, and a large number of her statesmen advocated it. It became a common occurrence for slave-holders, at their death, to leave their slaves free and provided for. John Randolph of Roanoke did this, and appropriated a large portion of his property for their support: thus the gradual banishment of slavery was looked upon as a certainty. Owing to this condition of affairs, slavery ceased to be regarded in the State as a matter of profit; the buying and selling of slaves was at least rare. Slave-dealers were looked upon with disgust. Families of negroes were retained in the same household for generations, passing down from father to son, until the affectionate connexion between the Virginia master and his servant, who had shared his boyish sports, and now performed the duties of a mild servitude, became proverbial.

We have seen from this history, both in her contests with England and under other circumstances, that Virginia never willingly conceded to another what she considered her rights; so it happened that when she found that her Northern sisters were attempting to force her to emancipate her slaves, the spirit of the Old Dominion rose. She remembered her Declaration of Rights, she recalled her State sovereignty, and tightening her grasp upon her property, which she was beginning to hold so loosely, she declared her intention to act for herself in the matter, made stricter laws with regard to her slave population, and joined hands with her Southern sisters upon the disputed question.

A History of Virginia for the Use of Schools, Mary Tucker Magill, 1876

This textbook was used at a colored school. At the turn of the century, these schoolchildren were just a generation or two removed from slavery. They knew from their families that the institution was never going to be "gradually banished" and that selling enslaved people and splitting up families was common.

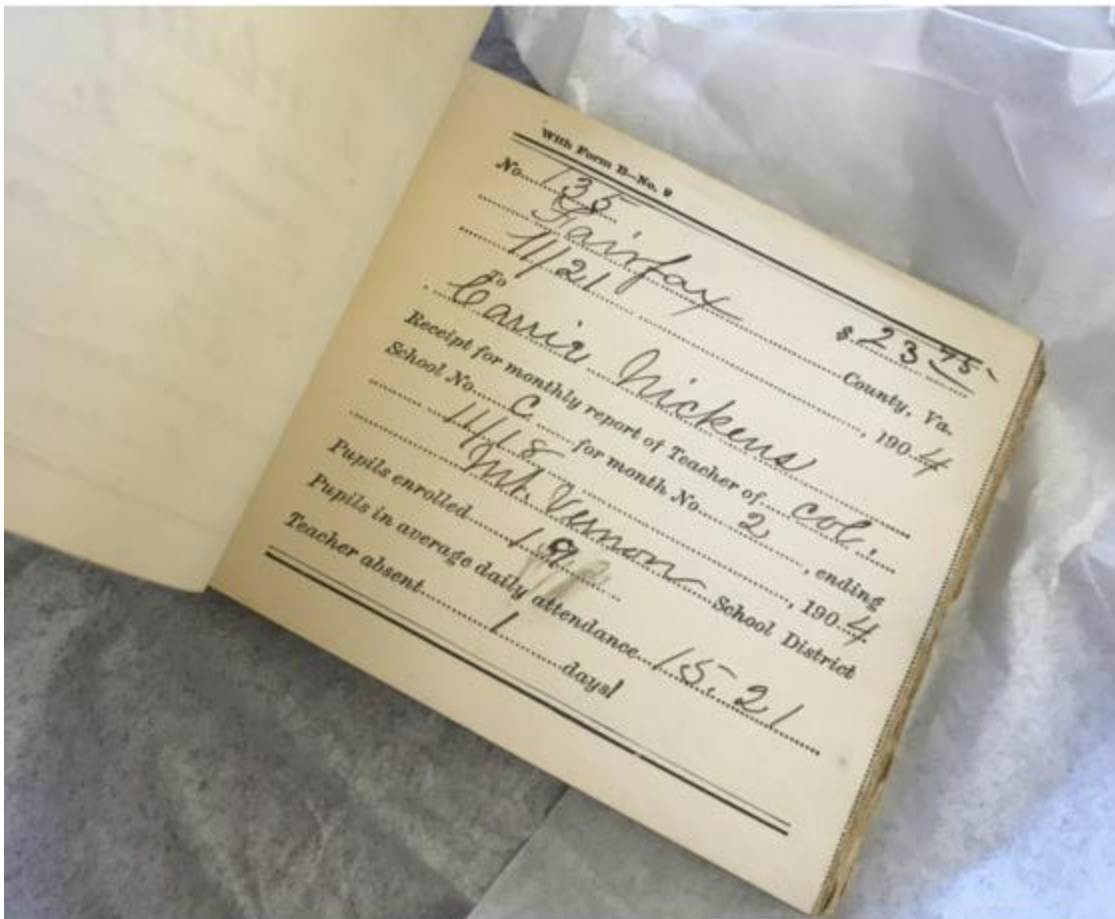
While today we view these depictions of history and slavery to be outdated, this is what students at the time were taught. This textbook was used in Virginia schools for 40 years. There was a large effort to teach a history that valued the South and its institutions. Justifying slavery and the Civil War were important to that mission. For students this was not a far-off history, their parents and grandparents lived through slavery and the Civil War. What they were taught in school about those topics was the

information they would pass down to their children and grandchildren. State approved textbooks and curriculum were an effective way of creating a specific popular memory of Virginia's history.

With Form B - No. 9
No. 114 Fairfax \$35.00 County, Va.
To Miss Dallis E. Hagan, ending
Receipt for monthly report of Teacher of White, 1904
School No. 1118 Falls Church School District
Pupils enrolled 33
Pupils in average daily attendance 27.94
Teacher absent 0 days

Falls Church White School Receipt, Hagan, 1904

While curriculum was not left up to the teachers, similarly to today, teachers would buy necessary materials for the classroom. Usually coal or firewood to keep the schoolhouse warm. This was kept track of in monthly receipts.



Monthly receipts varied from \$15 up to \$50 or greater.

The Court's records reveal how schools were organized, who was taught, and what was taught. Today we might take quality public education for granted, but we can see the foundation of the system we use today. Who knows what future historians will think of our schools today in 2150!

This Found in the Archives was written by former HRC intern Emma Lyons

Found in the Archives is a monthly publication of the Clerk of the Fairfax Circuit Court, 19th Judicial Circuit, who proudly serves The City of Fairfax and Fairfax County. The Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center (HRC) holds the early county and court records including deeds, wills, court minutes, chancery and law papers, marriage licenses, birth, death, and tax

records dating from 1742 through the early 1900s housed in approximately 2300 books and roughly 750 boxes of loose paper files. HRC is open Monday – Friday 8 am to 4 pm. and offers tours at 3pm on Friday. Click below to plan your next visit