WELCOME TO THE DOUGLASS HIGH SCHOOL COMMEMORATIVE COMMITTEE

On behalf of the Loudoun Douglass Alumni Association, and as Co-Chairs of the Commemorative Committee, we would like to thank you for volunteering to serve on the Douglass High School Commemorative Committee. Douglass High School is an important part of not only Loudoun County and Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) history but also the national African American struggle for equal education. Constructed in 1941 on land purchased by the Countywide League (for $4,000) and later transferred to the School Board for $1, Douglass High School was the County’s first accredited high school for African American students and remained segregated from 1941 to 1968, when Loudoun schools integrated under court order.

The current renovation project was approved by the Loudoun County School Board on November 29, 2016, as a part of the Capital Improvement Program budget. The action was in conjunction with the approval of funding for The North Star School, currently under construction on the former C. S. Monroe Technology Center site in Leesburg. With the relocation of the Douglass School programs to The North Star School this summer, renovation of Douglass High School will begin.

Commemorative works will be key elements incorporated in the building renovation to tell the story of Douglass High School. The charge of the Committee will be to review and develop options, both permanent and temporary, for relevant historic artifacts, memorabilia, and other possible interpretive building displays. The Committee’s mission will be to determine how the history and importance of Douglass High School will be shared and to recommend commemorative components for School Board action and funding, as necessary.

LCPS staff has been receiving community input since December 2019, when the first Douglass School community information meeting was held. In addition to community-wide feedback, staff has specifically sought the assistance of key stakeholders in formulating commemorative ideas and concepts. A copy of the initial commemorative concepts presentation prepared by LCPS staff in conjunction with the project’s consulting historic architect, Beyer Blinder Belle (BBB), is provided for the Committee’s background information. The stakeholders, including the Loudoun Douglass Alumni Association (LDAA), Loudoun’s National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Martin Luther King, Jr., I Have a Dream Committee (MLK Committee), and the Edwin Washington Project, have provided a wealth of recommendations. These have been assembled into the enclosed Commemorative Suggestions Tracking Chart and coupled with a graphic identifying potential commemorative opportunity spaces within the interior as well as on the grounds of Douglass High School. Combined, these recommendations afford a foundation upon which the Commemorative Committee may begin its work. At the end of the school year, on June 28, 2021, there will be an opportunity to tour Douglass High School one final time before construction and renovation work begins.
We thank you in advance for your service to this important project. Enclosed is the Committee roster and the planned meeting schedule. Also enclosed is a summary of Virginia’s Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). All Committee correspondence should utilize the DouglassRenovation@LCPS.org email address and LCPS staff will explain this further on May 24. We look forward to seeing you in-person on May 24th at 6:30 pm at the Frederick Douglass Elementary School Library (510 Principal Drummond Way, Leesburg).

At least for our first few meetings, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in line with current public-health mitigation recommendations and orders, everyone attending Committee meetings will be required to wear a face covering during our meetings and gatherings. Distancing protocols will also be in place for seating during our meetings. Precautions to prevent getting and spreading COVID-19 are necessary for everyone; if you do not feel well (a fever and symptoms such as a cough or difficulty breathing) on the day of any Committee meeting please self-isolate and let us know of you absence.

Thank you and again, if you have questions in advance of May 24, please reach out directly to DouglassRenovation@LCPS.org or 571-252-1050.

Charles Avery & Erica Bush, Co-Chairs
Douglass High School Commemorative Committee

Enclosed Documents:

- Douglass High School Commemorative Committee Roster
- 2021 Meeting Schedule, as of May 12, 2021
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Guidelines
- November 2020 Douglass High School Renovation Commemorative Concepts Presentation
- Commemorative Suggestions Tracking Chart, as of May 1, 2021
- Commemorative Opportunity Spaces/Interior and Exterior Douglass High School

Additional Documents Posted at: https://www.lcps.org/Page/224865
DOUGLASS HIGH SCHOOL
COMMEMORATIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS
May 12, 2021

Co-Chairs
Charles Avery, Loudoun Douglass Alumni Association
Erica Bush, Loudoun Douglass Alumni Association

Committee Members
Dwight Brooks, Loudoun County School Board Appointee
Gladys Burke, Loudoun County Heritage Commission
Valerie Bush, Loudoun County School Board Appointee
Tammy Carter, MLK ‘I Have a Dream’ Committee
Carlotta Coates, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors Appointee
Gertrude Evans, Loudoun County School Board Appointee
Margaret Good, Loudoun Preservation Society
Glory Howard, Loudoun County School Board Appointee
Joyce Jackson, Loudoun County School Board Appointee
Mary Randolph, Leesburg Town Council Appointee
James Roberts, Black History Committee
Larry Roeder, Edwin Washington Project
Larry Simms, Loudoun County School Board Appointee
Sylvia Smith, Loudoun County School Board Appointee
Michelle Thomas, NAACP – Loudoun Chapter

Loudoun County Public Schools Staff
Lottie M. Spurlock, Director of Equity, Office of the Superintendent
Beverly I. Tate, Director, Planning Division
Sara Howard-O’Brien, Land Management Supervisor, Planning Division
Donna Torraca, Planning Coordinator, Planning Division

CONTACT: DouglassRenovation@LCPS.org
571-252-1050
https://www.lcps.org/Page/224865
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT IDEAS</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
<th>ROTATING OR PERMANENT</th>
<th>INSIDE OR OUTSIDE</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>OTHER INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Historic Display Cases for Artifacts and Documents</strong></td>
<td>Model Replication of School with original blueprints</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bust of Frederick Douglass</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital Art/Photographs</td>
<td>Permanent/Rotating</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive Displays</td>
<td>Permanent/Rotating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Display Cases</td>
<td>Permanent/Rotating/Moveable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freestanding Large Photo Exhibits</strong></td>
<td>Docent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vinyl Wall Graphics</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alternatively, digital display which would scroll or change constantly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Banners hanging from ceiling</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Large Photos in Booth Seating Family Break Room</strong></td>
<td>Notable People of Loudoun County associated with the school</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Family Break Room</td>
<td>Suggestions included Marie Medley and Charles Hamilton Houston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tells the Community Story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child Play Area Graphics and Quotes</strong></td>
<td>Focus on children of 1941-1969 and what it was like for children at that time</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Child Play Area</td>
<td>Example: Mayday or old games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>History of the building from a child’s perspective</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower Level Gym Mural or Photo Wall</strong></td>
<td>Mural</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Gym Area</td>
<td>Tell the story of the championships the school won</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Banners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Large Vinyl Photos on wall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeline Exhibits Corridors or Reception Area</strong></td>
<td>Digital Timeline</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Reception Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive Timeline</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Reception Area or Corridors</td>
<td>Visitors should be able to touch and engage; Greensboro lunch counter as an example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walk Through History</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside or Outside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interpretative Trail/panels similar to Big Meadows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rotating Exhibits</td>
<td>Rotating</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Reception Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCEPT IDEAS</td>
<td>ITEMS</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
<td>ROTATING OR PERMANENT</td>
<td>INSIDE OR OUTSIDE</td>
<td>LOCATION</td>
<td>OTHER INFORMATION</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos or Informational Graphics Mounted with Plexiglass and Metal Standoffs</td>
<td>Photos of students who attended the school</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Reception Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile interpretative panels</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moveable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Signage Commemorative Plaques and Room Signage Dedication</td>
<td>Room dedication signage</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Throughout building</td>
<td>Names of Teachers or Students. Display Ram Mascot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wall to display trophies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed New Monument Sign</td>
<td>Text on Sign</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Front of School Near Market Street Entrance</td>
<td>Work of Art; Should include “Formerly Douglass High School (1941-1968)”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Style of Sign</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exterior Historic Marker</td>
<td>Corrections to Existing White Sign near Market Street</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Front of School on Market Street</td>
<td>Corrections Needed to Existing Sign</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of Proposed Entry Plaza Markers, Quotes, etc.</td>
<td>Statues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Statues of Houston, King, Douglass;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art Installation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Art installation that is inviting;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engraved Commemorative Pavers</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Could be an LDAA fundraiser where families purchase bricks with names of family members who attended or worked at school;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engraved Commemorative Site Elements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>List of students who attended school; School motto and quotes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commemorative Signage on Benches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Seating Area/ Amphitheater</td>
<td>Statues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art Installation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engraved Commemorative Pavers</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Outside</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engraved Commemorative Site Elements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commemorative Signage on Benches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mural on Exterior of Gym</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Basketball Court Area</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass sitting on a bench that visitors can sit with and take pictures; Stories about Charles Houston, Marie Medley, Tell the Countywide League history; MLK statue is for sale but is an Indoor statue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statue/Sculpture</td>
<td>Type and Location</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Inside or Outside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMMEMORATIVE SUGGESTIONS - Tracking Chart - As of May 1, 2021**
Douglass High School Commemorative Committee
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT IDEAS</th>
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<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>OTHER INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of Graduates, Instructors or Local Figures</td>
<td>Type and Location</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Inside or Outside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretative Markers within the Building</td>
<td>Type and Location</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretative Marker W&amp;OD Trail or other outdoor space</td>
<td>Type and Location</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming Pavilion or Other Outdoor Spaces</td>
<td>Type and Location</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relocation of Margaret Lloyd Memorial</td>
<td>Type and Location</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER</strong></td>
<td>Touchscreen Monitors</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent/Rotating Info</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>Reception Area</td>
<td>Videos of Douglass HS graduates discussing their memories and displayed in a video loop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral Histories</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Those who attended or worked at the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pictures of Groundbreaking ceremony</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital Yearbook</td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Inside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Douglass High School Commemorative Committee

MEETING SCHEDULE
6:30pm to 9:00pm
Frederick Douglass Elementary School
510 Principal Drummond Way, SE Leesburg

May 24, 2021

June 14, 2021

June 28, 2021
Meeting at Douglass High School
407 East Market Street

July 12, 2021

July 26, 2021

August 9, 2021

August 23, 2021

September 13, 2021

September 27, 2021

October 18, 2021

October 25, 2021

November 8, 2021

November 22, 2021

December 13, 2021

CONTACT: DouglassRenovation@LCPS.org
571-252-1050
https://www.lcps.org/Page/224865
SITE PLAN INDICATING EXTERIOR COMMEMORATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

- Along Fence Line (Metal Sculpture as Fence/Wall?)
- Along Trail (Signage or Pavement Markings?)
- Along Building Wall (Mural)
- Opportunity for Commemoration

**EXISTING**
- Historic Marker
- MLK Plaque
- Existing Building
- Mounted Plaque
- Picnic Shelter
- Original Bldg.
- Flood Plain
- Margaret Lloyd Memorial Stone to Be Relocated

**PROPOSED**
- Marker at Connection Point to Wood Trail
- Outdoor Basketball Court
- Outdoor Seating
- Storage Utility Enclosure (Unavailable)
- Restrooms
- Original Shop Bldg.
- Shed
- Entry Plaza
- Amphitheater
- Site Plan Indicating Exterior Commemorative Opportunities

**LOCATION**
- 1006 Blaine St NE, Washington, D.C.

**SCALING**
- 1" = 50'
E-MAIL AND MEETINGS: The VA Supreme Court has held that e-mails may constitute a "meeting" under FOIA if there is simultaneous e-mail communication between three or more board members. Avoid "reply to all" as a general rule. See FOIA Council handout entitled "Email and Meetings" available on the FOIA Council website.

*RECORDS*

WHAT is a PUBLIC RECORD?

ALL writings and recordings that consist of letters, words or numbers, or their equivalent, set down by handwriting, typewriting, printing, photostatting, photography, magnetic impulse, optical or magneto-optical form, mechanical or electronic recording or other form of data compilation, however stored, and regardless of physical form or characteristics, prepared or owned by, or in the possession of a public body or its officers, employees or agents in the transaction of public business.

ALL public records are OPEN to the public UNLESS a specific exemption in law allows the record to be withheld.

WHAT about RETENTION of PUBLIC RECORDS?

Public records MUST be retained according to retention schedules set by the Library of Virginia. The length of retention depends on the content of the record. After expiration of the applicable retention period, the records may be destroyed or discarded.

*E-MAILS*

Emails that relate to the public business are public records, regardless of whether you use your home or office computer, text or other forms of social media. It is the content of the record, not the equipment used, that controls.

As such, these emails must be retained as required by the VA Public Records Act. For practical advice for email use, access and retention, see FOIA Council handout entitled "Email: Use, Access and Retention" available on the FOIA Council website.

VA Freedom of Information Advisory Council:
Alan Gernhardt, Executive Director
Ashley Binns, Attorney
Email: foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov
Telephone (804) 698-1810
Toll-Free 1-866-448-4100
http://foiacouncil.dls.virginia.gov

Prepared by the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council
FOIA AND MEMBERS OF PUBLIC BODIES

*POLICY OF FOIA*

By enacting this chapter, the General Assembly ensures the people of the Commonwealth ready access to records in the custody of public officials and free entry to meetings of public bodies wherein the business of the people is being conducted. The affairs of government are not intended to be conducted in an atmosphere of secrecy since at all times the public is to be the beneficiary of any action taken at any level of government.

Unless a public body or public official specifically elects to exercise an exemption provided by this chapter or any other statute, every meeting shall be open to the public and all public records shall be available for inspection and copying upon request. All public records and meetings shall be presumed open, unless an exemption is properly invoked.

A public forum, candidate appearance, or debate, the purpose of which is to inform the electorate and not to discuss or transact public business.

FOIA AND MEMBERS OF PUBLIC BODIES

*MEETING REQUIREMENTS*

What is considered a MEETING under FOIA?

ANY gathering, including work sessions, of the constituent membership, sitting (or through telephonic or video equipment pursuant to § 2.2-3708.2) as:

- the board, or
- an informal assemblage of
  - (i) as many as three members, or
  - (ii) a quorum, if less than three, of the constituent membership,

WHEREVER the gathering is held:

REGardless of whether minutes are taken or votes are cast.

NOTE: This requirement also applies to ANY meeting, including work sessions, of any subgroup of the board, regardless how subgroup is designated (i.e. subcommittee, task force, workgroup, etc.).

WHAT is NOT a MEETING?

- The gathering of employees; or
- The gathering or attendance of two or more board/council members at:
  - Any place or function where no part of the purpose of such gathering or attendance is the discussion or transaction of any public business, and such gathering or attendance was not called or prearranged with any purpose of discussing or transacting any business; OR

**Minutes:** Minutes ARE REQUIRED for any meeting of the board/subgroup of the board.

**Voting:** NO secret or written ballots are ever allowed.

**Polling:** You MAY contact individual members separately (one-on-one) to ascertain their positions by phone, letter or email. REMEMBER: This exemption CANNOT be used in lieu of a meeting. REMEMBER ALSO: If you choose to use email to poll, you are creating a public record!

**Closed Meetings:** Allowed ONLY as specifically authorized by FOIA or other law and REQUIRES a motion stating the purpose, the subject and Code cite. [See § 2.2-3711 of FOIA for allowable purposes for closed meetings.]

**E-Meetings:** Are allowed for state public bodies under heightened procedural and reporting requirements (i.e. quorum must be physically assembled in one location, annual report to FOIA Council, etc.). For all public bodies, limited individual participation by electronic means is allowed under certain circumstances (personal matter, medical reason, or distance in the case of regional public bodies). [See § 2.2-3708.2 of FOIA.]
FEBRUARY 2004

COMMUNITY ICON
NICHOLS HARDWARE

IN CELEBRATION
OF CHAMPAGNE

DOUGLASS LEAVES
A LASTING LEGACY

HERE COMES THE
Bride
The days spent at Douglass High School seem distant now. But the memories, the events, and the spirit of that remarkable era endure.

As the last graduating class of Douglass marched forth to meet the world, they did so with hope and a touch of sadness. The year was 1968. That graduating class was representative of a relatively short—often turbulent—yet proud history of secondary education for African Americans in Loudoun County. The commemorative graduation ceremony was special because it marked the closing of not just any school, but one conceived and born with sweat and tears—and most of all, with love.

BY ELAINE E. THOMPSON
George W. Liverpool, the first principal of Douglass High School and his teaching staff.
The Frederick Douglass High School (on what is now Market Street) in Leesburg welcomed its first students in 1941. The school was the pride of the African American community. Its opening marked the culmination of years of sacrifice and commitment to ensure that students shut out of rural white schools were educated in a safe environment. In an era of adamant segregation, resistance often marked the pathway to the construction of Douglass. Reaching the community’s goal of having a new county-wide, accredited high school for African Americans was a triumphant first. The road was not easy. Until schools desegregated in the 1960s, the black community provided all but the bare essentials for the education of its children in Loudoun. For years, delegations of black parents and patrons met with the school board to request a new high school building, an expanded curriculum and additional teachers. Action was postponed or refused on the grounds that funds were not available. In the absence of progress with an all-white county school board, the consequence was a hardening of attitudes on both sides.

A COALITION OF FORCES

Gertrude Alexander, the first supervisor of African American teachers, recommended that all groups and delegations, especially the elementary school parent teacher associations, coordinate their efforts and work under the umbrella of a county-wide league. This resulted in significant progress.

The Loudoun County Wide League organized in the 1930s and elected John Wanzer of Middleburg as president and Eva Clark Sanford of Hamilton as secretary. Trustees were Robert Ambers, Luckett; Howard W. Clark, Sr., Hamilton; Fred Lewis, Round Hill; Elizabeth Quisenbury, Leesburg; and John Washington, Middleburg. The primary goals of the league were securing an updated secondary school building, the $6 yearly membership dues, the trustees purchased eight acres of land on Route 7, just outside Leesburg’s then-eastern limits. The owner, W. S. Gibbons, met the trustees at night and agreed to keep the sale of the $4,000 transaction secret. The trustees feared the school board and the county supervisors, who had refused to help with the purchase costs, would learn of the sale and find another roadblock.

According to the deed dated November 4, 1939, the trustees paid $1,400 as a down payment, with the balance secured by a vendor’s lien payable in 10 equal installments. A month later, William Hall, an African American contractor, secured a bank loan of $2,600 enabling the league to obtain a clear title. Eventually the school board approved the site for what would become Douglass High School. In a deed dated December 16, 1940, the eight-acre tract was sold for one dollar in cash to the Loudoun school board with the stipulation that it be “used for the benefit of the Negro public school children as an athletic field and as the location of a public Negro school and other improvements to be constructed thereon.”

LEGAL INTERVENTION

Its ongoing struggles with the school board prompted members of the African American community to seek legal counsel. Mrs. Alexander invited Charles Hamilton Houston, chief legal counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to evaluate the educational system. Already familiar with Loudoun, Houston readily agreed, and in February 1940 made the first of many trips to the county to assist in resolving the educational problems.
As an official of the NAACP, his services were without charge.

Houston believed that the heart of racial inequality in America was its segregated education system. He was opposed to "the separate but equal" philosophy, and his ultimate goal was to overturn Plessy v. Ferguson, the 1896 Supreme Court ruling that approved legally enforced segregation.

Because he suspected legal action would be required, Houston recommended organizing a local branch of the NAACP and forming a broader coalition of forces. Marie Medley of Leesburg was elected its president. At that point, technical leadership on the school initiative shifted from the league to the NAACP, with the league remaining as the chief fundraising and public relations arm. It encouraged citizens to pay the poll tax and to vote. Churches and other organizations helped get the message to the community. In a letter to Wanzer, Houston requested that meetings be held in some of the smaller villages to take the message to the people.

The Leesburg Parent Teachers Association, headed by William C. Harris, was another part of the coalition. Because elementary students shared the same unsafe building as the high school students at the Training School located on Union Street, these parents had a double interest. Houston asked a delegation of citizens to accompany him to inspect the public minutes of the county school board as well as receipt and disbursement records of the Loudoun schools. Marie Corum, Marie Medley, Elizabeth Quisenbury, and Irene Roberts volunteered for the tasks.

Houston began building a case to show the inequities that existed in the school system. His point was that separate but equal was an impossible policy. The school board reacted by hastening plans to repair the Training School, but as Houston pointed out to them, "This action is a mere scratch on the surface of the problem." Even the Virginia State Department of Education called the building "a very hazardous structure that should be abandoned at the very earliest time possible." Belatedly, the school board asked the board of supervisors "to make supplementary appropriations of $4,500 for improved Negro education." The supervisors declined.

Instead of condemning both boards, Houston and his clients were the epitome of courtesy. But at the same time, they methodically and incisively analyzed and documented everything. In a letter to the school board dated March 16, 1940, Houston outlined all the violations and the consequences for not correcting them. He concluded, if facilities, curriculum and transportation provided for white children were not provided for Negroes, the board of education was liable and could be sued. "We seek no favors. We want simple justice, the rights which are ours according to the law of the land," he wrote.

PRIDE OF OWNERSHIP

By January of 1941, the county solicited bids to build Douglass High School. At the February meeting, sealed bids were opened. William N. Hall, the contractor who had secured the loan for the league, lost out to the Taylor Manufacturing Company of Farmville, VA with a low bid of $35,436. By March the loans had been approved and the construction contracts signed. The Colonial Revival-style brick building consisted of four classrooms, a library, the principal’s office, a combined gym and auditorium and two lavatories.

At the request of the community, the school was named Frederick Douglass in honor of the famous abolitionist. The school board appointed George Williams Liverpool as principal, and in addition to the standard staff, the board hired a librarian, home economics and industrial arts teachers.

Throughout the summer of 1941, African Americans from all over the county made trips to Leesburg to see the fruits of their effort now under construction. Their work, however, was not over. Aside from desks, the school board supplied little else. Again, the league and other members of the coalition began serious fundraising. They purchased curtains for the stage and front windows, folding chairs for the auditorium, a piano, books for the library, miscellaneous equipment and supplies. Other items and landscaping were donated. The industrial arts students built the shop as part of their classwork.
Giving Students an Alternative

In its present-day use, the former Douglass High School serves as a community center and an alternative school for the public system. Alternative schools have often been looked upon as places for students who have no other choices.

Douglass was once Loudoun’s answer to “incorrigibles.” Disruptive students were then told “If you want to go to school, go there, that’s your only alternative.” About half of the alternative schools around the country still perpetuate that image. Douglass, on the other hand, has evolved into a voluntary program that students choose because it offers a smaller, more personalized environment to the traditional education format.

When looking at alternative education, there are three components necessary for a successful program—smaller class size, alternative scheduling and a unique instructional approach. Douglass limits class size to 15. Counselors have a smaller caseload than in a traditional school. A teacher advisory program monitors each student’s progress.

The Douglass School curriculum and behavioral expectations are the same as those of a traditional school, but its instructional format is different. Students take three courses during a nine-week grading period, rather than seven. Alternative instructional approaches offer opportunities for disenfranchised students by handling instruction a little differently.

One English teacher at Douglass starts his writing unit by teaching chess. He teaches the moves of all the players and has students play a few games. He comes back the next week and says, “You know how the knight has this function? When you’re writing, this technique has this function.” Having had the organization of chess and the concept of putting it together in a game, writing looks like putting pieces together and using techniques to get desired effects.

That’s what Douglass School is about, putting the pieces together and using different techniques to create success for each student.

—Excerpted from Loudoun County Public Schools Annual Report 2002-2003

The 1954 basketball team

The African American community considered Douglass their school, and the pride of ownership was very evident. At the November dedication, they filled the auditorium and adjoining classrooms. A.G. Richardson, supervisor of Negro education in Virginia, gave the keynote speech. Principal Liverpool, who also taught Latin and history, presented the new teachers: Gladys Kent, Edith Smith, Elsie Pierce, Florence Carroll, Elizabeth Jones and Moses Knox. Ruby Vaughn, the supervisor of teachers, John Wooten, Marie Medley and others brought greetings. The Afro-American newspaper of Baltimore covered the event extensively. Clippings were placed in scrapbooks.

The school year was off to a good start, but it was apparent the building was already too small. Classes were held on the stage in the library, and in the corners of the combined gym and auditorium. In later years when the concept of open classrooms became popular among public school authorities in the U.S., students who had attended Douglass chuckled. They had always had wall-less classrooms. But nothing could dampen the enthusiasm of the Douglass High students and teachers. Courses that had not been available at the Training School were offered. Clubs and athletic teams were organized.

In January 1942, Douglass High School received its certificate of accreditation for the 1941-1942 school year. In a letter to NAACP president Marie Medley, Liverpool wrote, “We are justly proud of these great strides in Negro education for Loudoun County, and are ever mindful of the outstanding role played by your Branch of the NAACP.” No doubt a letter was sent to the league as well, but the majority of their records have not survived.

When the United States entered World War II, the Douglass student body participated in the war effort. Most male members of the senior class joined the armed services. The school, which had become the hub of community fundraising activities to benefit Douglass, was told to conserve energy by curtailing all programs not directly sponsored by the school. Monthly meetings of the local PTA and the league were the only exceptions. All other activities required the approval of Dr. B.A. Brann, resident member of the school board.

Life at Douglass went on, and the school swiftly built a fine reputation. The Glee Club, Drama Club, New Homemakers of America and the sports teams competed on regional and state levels and brought home trophies. The school formed a chapter of the Lincoln National Honor Society to recognize outstanding students. In February 1944, the students printed their first newspaper, North Star, named after Frederick Douglass’ 1848 periodical. The newspaper staff changed the name to The Douglass Comet in the mid-1950s.

MONUMENTAL EVENTS

The 1950s introduced other monumental events. The first class under the 12-year plan graduated, and students published their first yearbook. Among improvements made to the
building was a modern science laboratory. On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court issued its unanimous ruling in Brown v. Board of Education declaring state-sponsored segregation in public schools unconstitutional. In addition to the obvious implications, Douglass High School had a personal interest in this ruling. Although he was no longer living, and his protégé Thurgood Marshall had argued the case, Charles Hamilton Houston was, as Marshall said, "the engineer of it all."

While the civil rights movement swirled about them, obvious changes at Douglass were minimal. The school board refused the league's request to have Douglass' graduations held at the new Loudoun County High School. A delegation consisting of Lovell Parham, Gladys Bryant, Hester Ramey, Violet Jackson, Charles Turner and Margaret Middleton asked the board to appoint an interracial committee to prepare for integration. Action was postponed. Students, bombarded by television accounts of civil rights protests, busied themselves with minor demonstrations, book reports, exams, college applications, homecoming parades, puppy love affairs, proms and graduations. The status quo was alive and well. Or was it?

Twelve students, already enrolled or slated to enter Douglass in the fall, applied in June of 1962 to the Virginia Pupil Placement Board to attend the county's two white high schools. One student was assigned to Loudoun County High School in Leesburg and three to Loudoun Valley in Purcellville. The other students were rejected.

The NAACP, on behalf of the students who were denied placement, filed suit in the United States District Court in Alexandria calling for the desegregation of the school system. The court ordered the board of education to implement a "Freedom of Choice" plan to phase out segregated schools. The board hired Carlton Penn II, later a distinguished Commonwealth's Attorney and circuit court judge, to represent them in the civil suit. Some students enrolled in the previously all white schools, but five years later, little progress had been made. Douglass continued to have an all black student body.

In addition to Liverpool, three other principals, Ulysses Oliver, Stephen Sydnor and James Woodson guided the school through changing times. C. M. Bussinger was now superintendent of schools and McKinley Jackson was president of the NAACP, but there was no meeting of the minds. The patience of the African American community was wearing thin, and so was that of the court.

With backing from the NAACP, Samuel Eugene Corbin, et al, Plaintiff-fidup and the United States Justice Department, Plaintiff-Intervenor, sued the School Board of Loudoun County. In 1967, Judge Oren Lewis ordered total integration on staff and student levels by the 1968-69 school year. Twenty-seven years after its founding, and 14 years after the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, Douglass closed its doors as a high school.

THE LEGACY CONTINUES

In recognition of the enormous contributions of the African American community to public education and as a monument to their unique experiences, Douglass High School was designated a Historic Virginia Landmark in 1991. The National Register of Historic Places added it as a site in 1992.

Several years after its closing, former students organized the Loudoun-Douglass Alumni Association. One of its major accomplishments was to have the name Douglass restored to the building, which took on a variety of names, depending on its use by the school board, since ceasing to be a high school.

Since its founding, the alumni association has awarded thousands of dollars in scholarships to the descendants of students who attended Douglass.

Elaine E. Thompson, a graduate of Douglass High School, is a retired teacher. A member of the Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Thompson has been instrumental in the publication of The Essence of a People, Volumes I and II, which honor the contributions of African Americans to Loudoun.

The author is indebted to Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC for the use of the Charles H. Houston papers; Loudoun County School Board for the use of its minutes; the County of Loudoun for use of court records; the Loudoun Douglass Alumni Association for use of its records and photographs.