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A Century of One- and Two- Room Schools: Teaching Yet Today By Ralph Buglass



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Front Cover: The restored one-room Kingsley School in Little Bennett Regional Park, Clarksburg (courtesy Daniel S. Potter) **Back Cover:** The two-room Quince Orchard Colored School in Gaithersburg (courtesy Ralph Buglass)

Teaching Yet Today: A Century of One- and Two-Room Schools

By Ralph Buglass

A century ago, the vast majority of the schools in Montgomery County were humble one- and two-room structures, providing equally basic education. Most are long gone but a surprising number still exist—in one form or another. While most of the survivors have been converted to various uses, a handful have been nicely restored as school museums to keep alive the story of early education; a few even serve as reminders of the days before universal, free public education. At least 34 vestiges of this bygone era¹ still stand, an astounding total considering how developed Montgomery County is today. Taken together, these surviving schoolhouses provide us with a remarkably rich, well-rounded history lesson of the early days of education in the County.

Importantly, they also underscore the degree to which race figured in early education here, as elsewhere in the South. Maryland, lying south of the Mason-Dixon Line, sanctioned slavery and then segregated its schools for about a century. Montgomery County's surviving black school buildings reflect the common practice of separate schools that were supposedly equal—but hardly were. Eight of the 34 surviving schools were for African-American students—reflecting the roughly one-to-four proportion of black-to-white schools that existed before larger, consolidated schools became the norm in the early 20th century.²



Author's map showing the locations, size, and racial makeup of the 34 surviving one- and two-room schoolhouses in Montgomery County today.

> Map from An Educational Survey of a Suburban and Rural County: Montgomery County, Md., published in 1913 by the U.S. Bureau of Education; the bulk of the schools shown—just under 100 altogether—were one- or two-room public schools. Larger, more widely dispersed buildings consolidated schools—would soon bring about the end of the small schoolhouse era.

Exactly half of the surviving colored schools, as they were known, were so-called Rosenwald schools—built for African-American students all over the South in the early 20th century in part with funding from philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, then president of Sears, Roebuck and Company. At one time, Montgomery County had a significant number of Rosenwald schools—17 out of about 150 built in Maryland, the northern-most state of the 15 comprising the Rosenwald school initiative.

Early Montgomery County Schools Before Public Education

The oldest survivor is Brookeville Academy, which dates to the early 19th century. Today it hardly resembles the iconic little red schoolhouse of popular imagination. Originally a one-room stone structure, it was expanded about three decades later with a second story.³ The addition underscores why it makes sense to group one- and two-room schools together. While one-room schoolhouses were the pioneers of the early education period, a second room was frequently added, as the Academy did. Much later in this period, more two-room schools were built outright. At the period's peak—about a century after Brookeville Academy was built—just under 100 one- and two-room schools existed in Montgomery County.

As a tuition-charging private school, Brookeville Academy predates public education. Incorporated by the Maryland General Assembly in 1815, it was one of the County's earliest private academies, at least six of which existed in the first half of the 19th century as the only option for formal education prior to the institution of public education midcentury. (Predating Brookeville was Rockville Academy, whose building—a replacement of the original structure—also still stands but is not included in this listing because it is a larger, multi-room structure.⁴) Brookeville Academy's trustees sold the stone building in the late 1860s and it deteriorated over the years. The Town of Brookeville bought it in 1989 and restored it as an attractive meeting space for community events and private rental functions.



Brookeville Academy (c.1815) is the earliest schoolhouse still standing in Montgomery County (author photo)





Brookeville (top) and **Seneca** are two of the earliest—and smallest—public schools surviving today (author photos)

A short distance away also in Brookeville is a circa-1865 wooden one-room schoolhouse that is one of the first built by the nascent Montgomery County public school system. Despite some earlier attempts,⁵ public education did not become firmly established here until 1864 when a new Maryland constitution provided for statewide free public education administered county by county,⁶ the system existing today. A quintessential one-room wooden school, Brookeville remained in use until the early 1920s, a lengthy lifespan not unusual for these humble buildings. After years in private hands and often vacant, it was restored in the early 2000s as a school museum thanks to a joint Town and volunteer undertaking.⁷ It is appropriately painted white—few early schools were actually red.

The same year the Brookeville schoolhouse was built so was one in Seneca—but it was still a private venture, perhaps reflecting doubts about or impatience with the new public system. Built of red sandstone quarried nearby, Seneca was begun by local mill owner Upton Darby with parents paying—either money or supplies such as wood—to send their children. It was later incorporated into the County school system that was finally taking hold.⁸ The school closed in 1910 and, like others, deteriorated over the years, but in 1981 the nonprofit organization Historic Medley District restored it and since has hosted thousands of visiting elementary-age students, re-creating for them what school was like in the late 1800s. The oldest surviving school for African-American students is Mt. Zion, south of Laytonsville, whose history tells the story of the beginnings of segregated education here.⁹ Mt. Zion is one of the County's oldest of numerous black communities that sprang up after the Civil War. Typically, a church was soon established as the focal point of the community which then often opened a school on its own.

This was the case in Mt. Zion. Tellingly, the school sits on the same plot of land as Mt. Zion United Methodist Church. The present-day church replaced one established by newly-emancipated slaves in the mid-1860s. The original also served as a school even before public education for African-Americans was mandated in Maryland.¹⁰ This did not come about until 1872, eight years after the new state constitution which had instituted public education (for white children, though not explicitly). The constitution also abolished slavery but made no provision for education of the children of emancipated slaves. Despite adoption of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and its guarantee of equality in 1868, there was little likelihood that black students would be joining their white counterparts in the existing public schools. After all, Maryland had rejected the proposed federal constitutional change in 1867 (and did not formally approve it until 1959). And so arose segregated schools.¹¹



Mt. Zion School (at left above and from its other side to show a later addition) was one of the earliest public schools for African-American children (author photos)

A year after the 1872 state requirement for a black school in each election district (by which time there were at least several white schools), the Mt. Zion community sought and received funding from the County to build a simple one-room school next to the church—one of the first public schools for blacks in Montgomery County. The school district later added a second room onto the building, and the structure survives today. When the school finally closed in the 1950s and was to be sold, the district discovered it had no actual deed and so returned it to the church.¹² The desire for education among former slaves—long denied learning opportunities—was so strong that the church had informally donated the land on which the school was built.

Schools From the Past, Museums Today

The Seneca and Brookeville schoolhouses, along with three other survivors, today serve as museums to provide a first-hand feel for early education. Although it is difficult to generalize about educational practices spanning a century-long period, with as yet few standardized policies, in these one-room schoolhouses one teacher taught children of many ages, usually in grades 1-7. Lessons focused on the so-called 3Rs—the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Numerous other Rs were significant in early education: recitation and rote memorization, the rod to reinforce rules (very much at the teacher's discretion), respect for others—moral education was a strong component—and recess, as much a rest for the teacher as playtime for students. Few students went beyond seventh grade; indeed, the County's first high school—in Rockville and for white children only—did not come about until 1892.¹³

The three other school museums advance us in time. Evocative of the rural settings of most one-room schools is Kingsley, located in its original spot in what is now Little Bennett Regional Park up-county (and restored by Montgomery Parks with assistance from the Clarksburg Historical Society). Situated on a slight rise above the creek that gives the park its name (and from which a strong student would fetch water), it is today surrounded by so many trees it is hard to imagine the area was agricultural when Kingsley was built in 1893 so area farm children could more easily walk to school—still as much as several miles.

With money from the school district (\$399, to be exact), the residents built the school themselves according to simple plans with basic materials—as was usually the case. The first teacher at Kingsley was male and lived nearby in Hyattstown with his wife and young family; all subsequent teachers were female, unmarried (married women could not be teachers until decades later), and generally boarded with a local family. And Kingsley's closure—in 1935—was largely due to what spelled the end of the one- and two-room schoolhouse era: consolidation—larger, more widely dispersed buildings (eventually allowing each grade in its own classroom) to which students were transported in buses. ¹⁴

The other two school museums—Boyds and Smithville—were, like Mt. Zion, originally schools for African-Americans. Each adds significantly to the story of school segregation, but turns this unfortunate history into a positive learning experience today; as a roadside sign in front of one of them aptly puts it: "That which was designed to separate us will unite us."



Though similar in appearance, Kingsley (left) was for white students and Boyds housed African-American students (author photos)

Boyds shows this separation was hardly equal. Open from 1896 to 1936,¹⁵ it is about the same size and time period as Kingsley, but the similarities end there. The black schools generally housed more students per building; they often closed months earlier in the school year when funds ran out; the black teachers were generally paid half as much as their white counterparts; students learned from hand-me-down books from the white schools—with pages frequently missing; and parents and others often contributed needed supplies on their own.¹⁶ The Boyds Historical Society, which restored the building in the late 1980s, invites the public to visit and glimpse into this past.

As the best-restored Rosenwald school in the County, Smithville (in Colesville)—the only two-room school museum—moves us further ahead in time to this important chapter in education for black students. Built in 1928, it closed in 1952 and was then used as a school bus depot until being rescued in the early 2000s by members of the prominent African-American fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha, many of whom attended the school. The historical significance of Rosenwald schools is increasingly being recognized¹⁷ and Montgomery County is lucky to have this restored example.



Smithville is the County's only Rosenwald school restored as a school museum (author photo, above; 1998 photo prior to restoration courtesy of MHT, top right; historical school photo courtesy of Alpha Phi Alpha Montgomery County chapter, bottom)



Rosenwald Schools: Advancing African-American Education

Nearly 5,000 Rosenwald schools were constructed from Maryland south to Florida and west to Texas between 1917 and 1932; those in Montgomery County were all built in the 1920s. These public schools ultimately enrolled about one-third of all black students throughout the South (nearly double that proportion in Montgomery County, further attesting to their importance here). Julius Rosenwald provided seed money for these buildings; local governments had to contribute a share as did the black communities seeking a school—even though they were already being taxed for schools. (It should be noted, however, that Montgomery County's funding share was a much higher proportion than local governments further south contributed.)

Though operating within segregated systems, Rosenwald schools were crucial in advancing education for African-Americans. Nearly universally, students recall deeply committed teachers who stressed education as an important route to a better life. Most of the buildings were erected according to exacting standards to ensure quality construction; for example, they were characterized by banks of large windows to get maximum interior light.

Three other Rosenwald schools-nearly identical to Smithville when built-are still standing in Montgomery County but less recognizable as schools today: Norbeck, Ken-Gar, and Poolesville. Norbeck (between Rockville and Olney) and Ken-Gar (on the boundary of Kensington and Garrett Park) are now County-owned recreation centers. Despite significant renovations, each is the same basic structure as when it was a school. Poolesville (about a mile north of its namesake town) is a fueling station for the County Department of Transportation-a fate similar to Smithville's use as a bus depot-but it is the only Rosenwald survivor to retain its characteristic large windows.¹⁸ Norbeck, Ken-Gar, and Poolesville each stand near a historically blackchurch that figured in the development of predecessor schools, underscoring the role of churches in early education for African-Americans.



Norbeck and **Ken-Gar** Rosenwald Schools retain their basic shape despite renovation (author photos, left; top right photo courtesy of *M-NCPPC*, bottom right photo from the book From One Room to Open Space)



Poolesville School is today a County-owned garage, but it alone of the Rosenwald survivors has its distinctive tall windows (author photos)

Two Rosenwald schools that do not survive—though their location in Rockville is commemorated by a sign—deserve mention. At the Rockville primary school, the teaching principal made history by bringing a lawsuit against the disparate pay black teachers received.¹⁹ And on the same site was the first high school for black students, which finally became a reality in 1927 after decades of lobbying by the black community. By the time secondary education was made available to African-Americans—55 years after they gained access to public education and 35 years after the County's first high school for white students was built—a total of 10 white high schools then existed, many of them substantial brick structures. Rockville Colored High School, like all local Rosenwald schools, was made of wood—and had to share a bathroom with the black primary school.²⁰

One other surviving Rosenwald school is today a handsome residence in Sandy Spring, but because it had three rooms it is not included in this listing of 34 surviving smaller schoolhouses.²¹ Of the 17 Rosenwald schools built in Montgomery, four were one-room buildings; most, like Smithville, Norbeck, and Poolesville, had two rooms (as did Ken-Gar, though it was originally built with just one); Sandy Spring and Rockville High had three. With five Rosenwald schools still standing (including the Sandy Spring residence), this yields a survival rate of almost 30 percent, much higher than throughout the South.²² As Montgomery County's government owns three of the survivors, there is potential for a restoration on the order of Ridgeley Rosenwald school in Prince George's County, which was also rescued from being used as a bus depot to become a premier Rosenwald restoration.

The remaining two black schools still standing, Quince Orchard and Martinsburg, followed a similar historical pattern to Mt. Zion. Quince Orchard, south of Kentlands, dates to 1874—just two years after black public education was instituted—although black residents opened a school there earlier, and then established a church—a reversal of the usual pattern.²³ When the school burned in the early 1900s it was replaced by one nearby that had been for white students.²⁴ So in addition to receiving used books, black schools themselves were sometimes hand-



Quince Orchard School is part of the present-day Pleasant View Historical Site (author photo)

me-downs. Much later, it had one of the largest enrollments of black children in a single-room building until an addition was made in 1941.²⁵ Today, Pleasant View Historical Association opens the school for special events and is currently garnering support to stabilize and ensure the future of the school, church, and cemetery on this designated historic site.

The one-room Martinsburg school that still stands near the far western edge of the County also sits alongside the church which figured in its establishment; in fact, the church itself served as a school beginning in 1880—a prime example of a frequent pattern. The school district finally paid for a school building to be erected in 1886. Behind this school is another noteworthy structure that stands today—the Loving Charity Hall, a benevolent society building. Such societies provided services like insurance that were otherwise unavailable to African-Americans. The Martinsburg site may be the last in Maryland to have three institutions standing that once formed the nucleus of many black communities.²⁷



Martinsburg (left) School sits next to the historically black church that initially housed the public school and in front of a dilapidated benevolent society building (author photo)

A final observation about these surviving African-American schools: a building just across the road from Boyds Negro School—the Edward U. Taylor Elementary School (named for a County Supervisor of Colored Education and now a school science supplies repository)—helps to complete the local school segregation story. It was one of four elementary schools built in the early 1950s to consolidate and upgrade facilities for the County's African-American students. But only a few years later school segregation was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court as inherently unequal. Of these four new schools, only Taylor became an integrated mainstream school during desegregation —a process that was officially accomplished in Montgomery County by 1961, seven years after the Supreme Court decision but ahead of many other Maryland counties.²⁸

Once Schools, Now Homes

As Montgomery County is a very residential area today, it is perhaps fitting that 15 of the 34 early schoolhouses still standing exist as homes. Some are quite modest in appearance and, to varying degrees, still look somewhat as they did as schools; others have been nearly subsumed by additions and modifications. However, their earlier uses can often be visually confirmed by banks of equally spaced windows or their 12-foot heights typical of early schoolhouses (generally, a residential story is eight feet high).



Mt. Lebanon School as a home today (left photo courtesy of MHT) and in a 1929 photo from the Maryland News, a County newspaper published 1927-1975; the paper's June 7, 1929, edition included photos of numerous white public schools

Seven historic one-room schools exist today with relatively few modifications; despite being converted to homes, they all pretty much retain their original shape and appearance: Mt. Lebanon, Light Hill, Cedar Heights, Grifton (all in the County's northeastern portion), Dawsonville (in western Montgomery County), Sandy Spring, and St. John's Academy. Light Hill is the oldest of this group of survivors; it was one of the first built by the nascent County school district in the 1860s (like Brookeville's one-room schoolhouse).²⁹ Sandy Spring sits next to the venerable Friends Meetinghouse and initially housed grades 1-3 for the private Sherwood Academy (run by Quakers), which joined the public school district in 1906; its heritage is thus both public and private like Seneca and some of the early black schools.³⁰



Dating to the 1860s, this home was once **Light Hill** School (author photo)



Dawsonville, Cedar Heights, Grifton, and Sandy Spring schools (clockwise from top left) as they look today (author photos)



The only parochial school still standing is **St. John's Academy** for girls (author photo)

St. John's Academy is the only parochial school among the early schools still standing. Located near the original St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Forest Glen, it was constructed by the parish in 1874 as a school for girls but just nine years later was converted into a rectory; it has been a private home since 1944 and today is in some disrepair.³¹ Regarding education for girls in the days of these schoolhouses it is worth noting that both genders were generally afforded the same educational opportunities (and most photos show roughly equal numbers of girls and boys), though they sometimes sat on separate sides of the room. Three other one-room schools—Fairland, Garrett Park, and Seneca Mills (a successor to the Seneca stone schoolhouse and also known as Berryville)—exist as part of larger homes, which in the case of Garrett Park and Seneca Mills almost overwhelm the original building. Coincidentally, both Fairland³² and Seneca Mills³³ were bought after their closure and turned into residences by individuals who had been students in each.





A one-room school (as shown in a Burtonsville Free Press photo, c. 1900, above), **Fairland** was expanded to become a home; the original portion is that with shutters on its windows today (author photo, left)





The **Garrett Park** one-room schoolhouse (above, courtesy of the Town of Garrett Park) today sits behind a screen porch and exists as part of a larger dwelling (author photo, left)





The **Seneca Mills** one-room schoolhouse (Maryland News photo, above) still stands as the left-most portion of a residence that nearly dwarfs it (author photo, left)

Five other schools-now-homes were two-room buildings: Lewisdale, Hyattstown, Barnesville, Wheaton, and Chevy Chase. Lewisdale (midway between Hyattstown and Damascus) was the only one of these to start as a one-room school, in 1900; a second room was added in 1913,³⁴ giving the school an unusual T-shape-still its basic form as a residence today. This school replaced nearby Light Hill when the latter closed. Hyattstown and Barnesville were early two-room structures built of wood that looked similar to the numerous one-room schools onto which a second room was later added (that is, end-toend), but they included a center entrance between the two rooms-a feature that would become fairly standard. Wheaton, built in 1903 to replace a school that burned, was one of the first brick school buildings in the County. Unusual also was that Wheaton Colored School (long gone) stood adjacent; rarely were the separate schools for white and black students so close to each other.35



Lewisdale, Hyattstown, and Barnesville as homes today (left, top to bottom, author photos) and corresponding photos from the Maryland News, 1929. All have retained their basic shape; Lewisdale even has its original attic and basement windows on one gable end; Hyattstown's entryway appears gone, however.



Wheaton was one of the first brick two-room schools (left, courtesy of Peerless Rockville); today it is a two-story residence (author photo)

Chevy Chase School, now an elegant home, has a fascinating history all its own. Built near the close of the 19th century, it was one of the first down-county schools. Until the early 1900s, students close to Washington, DC, often commuted to schools there. Chevy Chase, Maryland, was then being developed as an early suburb. The developers built the school—no doubt thinking it would attract home-buying families—and donated to the school district the land on which the school sat, but the County paid the construction costs of \$2,200—significantly more than other schools. Still, many new residents chose to send their children to a highly regarded school just over the line in Chevy Chase, DC. As a result, under-enrollment of the Montgomery County Chevy Chase School forced its closing in just five years—and it was sold for a \$500 loss. However, in 1911 Washington started charging Maryland residents to send their students there and a year later an act of Congress flatly prohibited Montgomery County students from attending DC schools, necessitating the County to build another school in Chevy Chase.³⁶



The two-room **Chevy Chase** School as it looks today (left) and in a blueprint drawing of the original school (both images courtesy of Chevy Chase Historical Society)

Two-Room Survivors Serving as Schools of a Sort

Four other two-room schools survive, three of which are used today as preschools: Montrose, Clarksburg, and Garrett Park. Montrose and Clarksburg are nearly identical except the former is stucco and the latter wood; both were designed by Rockville architect T.C. Groomes and built in 1909 (and both are on the National Register of Historic Places; the chart "One- and Two-Room Schools Still Standing in Montgomery County, MD, in 2015" shows schools with federal and County protected status).

Clarksburg sits next to the current elementary school bearing the same name. In 1972 it ceased to be used on a regular basis—distinguishing it as the schoolhouse from this early period which served the latest in time—and then was moved a short distance from its original location (to allow more room for the ever-expanding newer elementary school).³⁷ Montrose lasted nearly as long—until 1966 for a small number of special needs students.³⁸ Road projects in the early 1970s nearly doomed that building, but the preservation organization Peerless Rockville rescued it and continues to maintain it today.



Clarksburg (left) and Montrose, both two-room schools built in 1909, today serve as preschools (author photos)

Garrett Park serves as a bookend to the one- and two-room school era. The same year this handsome brick building was built (1928) a similar looking but larger school—Glen Echo-Cabin John—opened; both were among the first in the County designed by Howard Cutler, a prominent Washington-area architect who was responsible for the look of many of the increasingly modern schools built in Montgomery County over the next decades. Later renamed for Clara Barton who headquartered the American Red Cross nearby, this larger school clearly heralded the demise of the early schoolhouse era here.³⁹



The 1928 two-room **Garrett Park** School marked the end of the oneand two-room schoolhouse era (author photo)

The other two-room schoolhouse surviving today is Burtonsville. It was constructed in 1910,⁴⁰ a year after Montrose and Clarksburg on a slightly different plan (in terms of size and window placement), but all three and Wheaton display similar hip roofs. Burtonsville's appearance today is compromised by a cinderblock addition erected some years ago. In use today by a church, it is the only school for white children to be so used.





Burtonsville from roadside (left) and showing its later ciderblock addition (author photos)

Time's Toll on Three Historic Schools

The last three schools among this collection of 34 survivors demonstrate how long ago this early schoolhouse era actually was, as the years have taken a severe toll on these structures. They are in varying degrees of deterioration—one practically in ruins.

All are on the western edge of the County in still rural settings today: Poole's Tract, Elmer, and Browningsville. Originally a one-room school, Poole's Tract gained a second room at some point but remained a simple, relatively small school; when it closed a neighboring farmer bought it and used it for storage. It is mostly intact, but the years of neglect are evident. Elmer has nearly collapsed and is almost overgrown by trees and underbrush. However, its window frames and distinctive interior metal wainscoting are still evident.

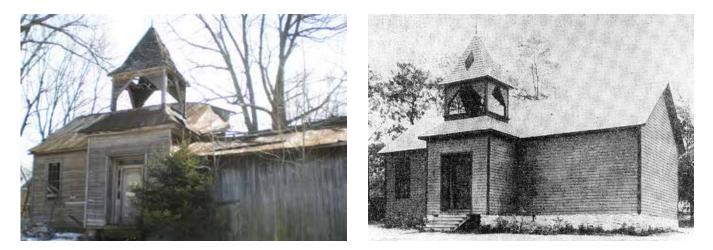


Poole's Tract School has deteriorated greatly over the years (author photo)



Elmer School is in barely visible amid underbrush and trees (left, author photo); a light snowfall reveals the doorway and a window (center, author photo) evident in a 1929 Maryland News photo (right)

Browningsville, though severely dilapidated, still shows what an eye-catching, imposing structure it was—one of the most visually interesting early schoolhouses in the County. Initially a typical one-room building, a second room was added along with a bell tower that created a formal entrance. A few years ago, the roof on the original one-room portion caved in under the weight of a heavy snowfall. The building's owners appreciate its significance but so far have been unable to restore it.



Perhaps the most handsome old schoolhouse in its day as shown by its 1929 Maryland News photo (right), **Browningsville** is one those barely standing today (author photo, left)

Could There Be Others Surviving Somehow?

The author believes this listing of 34 surviving schoolhouses is exhaustive (but welcomes any possible leads). The following held out some possibility, but had to be eliminated.

• The one-room Goshen School gained a substantial stone addition after it became a residence and that addition exists today as part of a much larger, newer house—the construction of which entailed demolition of the original school.

• Purdum Colored School students met only in a church that still stands between Clarksburg and Damascus and it seems inappropriate to count a church as a school, even though that was sometimes the case—for black students.

Historic Schools You Can Visit

The five schoolhouses in Montgomery County restored as museums—Boyds, Brookeville (oneroom school), Kingsley, Seneca, and Smithville—are open to the public for visitation at various times during the year. Most are open during Heritage Days, the last weekend in June (when some other former schools such as Quince Orchard, Martinsburg, and Clarksburg occasionally open as well); check www.heritagemontgomery.org for the schedule.

Seneca (on River Road west of Potomac) is open to school groups during the school year. Boyds Negro School (on White Ground Road) is open the last Sunday of each month from April through October 2-4 p.m.; a video featuring interviews with former students is a highlight. Kingsley is open the first Sunday of each month from April through October 1-4 p.m.; adding to the historical experience, visitors walk down a gravel road from Clarksburg Road—much as young scholars of olden days walked to school. • Halstead School, at the base of Sugarloaf Mountain just over the Montgomery County line in Frederick County, was moved there after apparently once sitting on the county line and—for a time—jointly administered by both counties.⁴¹ As it no longer stands in Montgomery County it is not included.

• The school for white children in Boyds sat close to Ten Mile Creek, one of three streams dammed in the 1980s to form Little Seneca Lake. Inundated with water rather than demolished, it likely has rotted away, but might a school of fish be swimming in it?

Some former one- and two-room schoolhouses survive today in name only. Wayside (north of Potomac), Woodfield, and Cedar Grove Elementary Schools (the latter two south of Damascus) take their names from long-gone early schools that existed near the current buildings. (The present-day Woodfield Elementary actually is on the site of one of several earlier structures bearing that name.⁴²) Similarly, Snouffer School Road serves as a reminder of the one-room school that fronted on it, once located at the edge of what today is the entrance to Green Farm Conservation Park. And an archeological dig currently underway south of Poolesville may have uncovered the foundation of the old Cedar Bend school. All others seem long-gone.

Still, as the author William Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." The 34 early schoolhouses standing yet today in Montgomery County—and the stories they tell of a bygone era of education—bear out this sentiment with a rich living history.

About the Author

Ralph Buglass, a Montgomery County native and product of its school system, is a volunteer docent at the restored one-room Kingsley School in Clarksburg. A member of the MCHS Speakers Bureau, he has presented locally on the County's surviving early schoolhouses and on Maryland's Rosenwald schools at a 2015 national conference; additionally, he has taught several continuing education courses on the history of school segregation. A retired communications professional and lifelong history buff, he holds a B.A. in history from Cornell University and an M.A. in journalism from American University.

One- and Two-Room Schools Still Standing in Montgomery County, MD, in 2015

Schools	Years	White/Black	Current Status/Historic Designation
Barnesville	1896-1939	White	Residence
Boyd	1896-1936	Black	School museum/MP
Brookeville (1-room)	1865-19205	White	School museum/MP and NR
Brookeville Academy	1815-1867	White	Town/rental use/MP and NR
Browningsville	1899-1932	White	Ruins
Burtonsville	1910-19508	White	Church use
Cedar Heights	1898-1923	White	Residence
Chevy Chase	1898-1903	White	Residence
Clarksburg	1909-1972	White	Preschool/MP and NR
Dawsonville	1894-1923	White	Residence
Elmer	1910-1930	White	Ruins
Fairland	1895-1920s	White	Residence
Garrett Park (1-room)	1893-1928	White	Residence/NR
Garrett Park (2-room)	1928-1952	White	Preschool
Grifton	1905-1912	White	Residence
Hyattstown	1878-1946	White	Residence/MP
Ken-Gar (Rosenwald)	1927-1955	Black	Recreation, community center
Kingsley	1983-1935	White	School museum/MP
Lewisdale	1900-1935	White	Residence
Light Hill	1868-1898	White	Residence
Martinsburg	1886-1939	Black	Church use/MP
Montrose	1909-1966	White	Preschool/MP and NR
Mt. Lebanon	1900-1933	White	Residence/MP
Mt. Zion	1873-1939	Black	Church use/MP
Norbeck (Rosenwald)	1927-1951	Black	Recreation, community center/MI
Poole's Tract	1876-1931	White	Ruins
Poolesville (Rosenwald)	1927-1952	Black	County transportation dept. garag
Quince Orchard	1902-1952	Black	Church, community use/MP
Sandy Spring/Sherwood Academy	Early 1900s	White	Residence
Seneca	1865-1910	White	School museum/NR
Seneca Mills	1900-1931	White	Residence
Smithville (Rosenwald)	1927-1952	Black	School museum/MP
St. John's Academy (parochial)	1874-1883	White	Residence/MP
Wheaton	1903-1927	White	Residence

Notes: Some years are approximate as sources vary or are sketchy. MP indicates designation on the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation. NR indicates listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Notes:

I. In a previous *Story* article on early schoolhouses, Donald M. Leavitt rightly termed "little one- and two-room schoolhouses" the "mainstay" of the County's early educational system, a period he identified as lasting from the mid-1800s to the early 20th century. *The Montgomery County Story* (Rockville: Montgomery County Historical Society [MCHS], vol. 22, no. 2, May 1979), 2.

2. Based on a listing of schools in H.N. Morse, E. Fred Eastman, and A.C. Monahan (for the U.S. Bureau of Education), *An Educational Survey of a Suburban and Rural County: Montgomery County, Md.* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 24.

3. Anne Marie Lemon, The Brookeville Academy (unpublished manuscript at the MCHS Jane C. Sween Library), 25, 27.

4. Early academies included, besides Rockville and Brookeville, Clarksburg, Andrew Small in Darnestown, Barnesville, and Fair Hill in Sandy Spring.

5. The General Assembly passed a special act for Montgomery County in 1839 providing for primary schools in each election district but the "County's commitment to education remained haphazard until 1860, when the General Assembly authorized a Board of Commissioners of Public Schools." Richard K. MacMaster and Ray Eldon Hiebert, *A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland, 1776-1976* (Rockville: Montgomery County Government and MCHS, 1976), 143-144. However, this was not yet a universal free system that is associated with public education today as a one-dollar-per-quarter "tuition fee" was charged. E. Guy Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space: A History of Montgomery County Schools from 1732 to 1965* (Rockville: Montgomery County Public Schools, 1976), 33. No schoolhouses built during this early period of public education exist today.

6. Article VIII, Section 4, provided for establishment of a "uniform system of free public schools…kept open and supported, free of expense for tuition…for at least six months in each year." Maryland State Archives, http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/ sc2908/000001/000102/html/amr02--762.html.

7. "Brookeville starts restoration of schoolhouse," Gazette.net, http://www.gazette.net/gazette_archive/2002/200242/olney/news/126308-1. html.

8. "Seneca schoolhouse," http://www.historicmedley.org/visit/seneca-schoolhouse.

9. The earliest known school for African-Americans in Montgomery County was housed in Sandy Spring's Sharp Street Methodist Church, the oldest African-American congregation in the County, which came about after Sandy Spring Quakers began freeing their slaves in the late 1700s. The school dates to the 1860s, perhaps earlier, and was later incorporated into the County public school district. *Community Cornerstones* (Germantown: Heritage Tourism Alliance of Montgomery County, 2012), 27; Clare Lise Kelly, *Places from the Past: The Tradition of* Gardez Bien *in Montgomery County, Maryland* (Silver Spring: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission [M-NCPPC], 2012), 127; Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), Inventory of Historic Places, M: 28-11-4, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property. 10. MHT Inventory, M: 23-53, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.

11. Regarding the rise of school segregation in the South generally, an eminent historian has written, "Mixed schools had no chance [of succeeding] whatever. Even the friends of Negro education...were forced to the unpleasant but inescapable conclusion that the only real chance for success in the education of Negroes lay in the establishment and maintenance of separate schools." John Hope Franklin, "Jim Crow Goes to School: The Genesis of Legal Separation in Southern Schools," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 58 (Spring 1959), 231.
12. Nina H. Clarke and Lillian B. Brown, *History of the Black Public Schools of Montgomery County, Maryland, 1872-1961* (Silver Spring: Bartley Press, 1995), 130.

13. Initially, high school did not extend beyond eighth grade; twelfth grade did not come about until 1926. Jewell, 143.

14. MHT Inventory, M: 10-48, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.

15. MHT Inventory, M: 18-11-1, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.

16. Although Boyds and Kingsley look similar today, black schools generally were in far worse condition than white schools. "Nearly all the colored schools are in a more or less dilapidated condition," concluded a 1912 Presbyterian Church survey. Warren Wilson and Anna B. Taft, *A Rural Survey in Maryland* (New York: Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, 1912), 70.
17. Much credit goes to a 2015 documentary titled *Rosenwald* and the National Trust for Historic Preservation which has placed Rosenwald

18. MHT Inventory, M: 23-113-1, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.

schools as a group on its list of most endangered historic places.

19. William B. Gibbs, Jr., was represented in his 1936 suit by Thurgood Marshall, then an NAACP attorney who sought such cases to begin building a legal assault on school segregation that culminated in the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision overturning the practice. Gibbs' suit was settled out of court, with the County bringing black teachers' pay up to parity with whites in two years, but Gibbs was later fired for reasons that are still unclear. Larry S. Gibson, *Young Thurgood* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012), 315-320. Today, Montgomery County has elementary schools named for both Gibbs and Marshall. 20. The Rosenwald high school was succeeded by Lincoln High School (1935) and Carver High School and Junior College (1950), all in different locations in Rockville. The first high school opened with just grades 7 and 8; by 1930 it extended to grade 11. Grade 12 was added in 1942—16 years after the white high schools included grade 12. Warrick S. Hill, *Before Us Lies the Timber: The Segregated High School of Montgomery County, Maryland, 1927-1960* (Silver Spring: Bartleby Press, 2003).

21. Listings of Montgomery County's Rosenwald schools can be found at the Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card File Database, http://rosenwald.fisk.edu; in Clarke and Brown, 44; and in Susan G. Pearl, "The Rosenwald Schools of Maryland: Multiple Property Documentation," 13-18, 22-23, http://www.preservationmaryland.org/uploads/file/Rosenwald Schools of Maryland_text.doc. Fisk lists only one Rockville school, considering the 1927 high school an addition to the original 1920 school, nor does it list Smithville, which Clarke and Brown document as receiving Rosenwald funding; elaboration on this point is provided in Pearl, 17, note 36.

22. The National Trust estimates that as few as 15 percent of Rosenwald Schools survive today. "Rosenwald Schools," https://savingplaces. org/places/rosenwald-schools.

- 23. Clarke and Brown, 3.
- 24. Clarke and Brown, 21.
- 25. Kelly, 228.

26. MHT Inventory, M: 16-12-12, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.

27. "Warren Historic Site: History," http://warrenhistoricsite.weebly.com/history.html.

28. These schools numbered five if Carver High School is included; Carver did not stay in use as a school after desegregation but became the County school administration headquarters, its use today. Two of the 1950s consolidated black elementary schools (Rock Terrace and Longview) became special needs schools and the other (Sandy Spring) was converted into one of the County's first community centers after also being used a short time for special needs. The school desegregation process in Montgomery County is comprehensively detailed in Clarke and Brown, 101-132.

29. Dona L. Cuttler, *The History of Clarksburg, King's Valley, Purdum, Browningsville and Lewisdale, Maryland* (Bowie: Heritage Books, 2001), 241.

30. MHT Inventory, M: 28-11, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property, and Thomas Y. Canby and Elie S. Rogers, *Sandy Spring Legacy* (Sandy Spring: Sandy Spring Museum, 1999), 120.

- 31. MHT Inventory, M: 31-8, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.
- 32. MHT Inventory, M: 34-6, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.
- 33. Margaret Marshall Coleman, Montgomery County: A Pictorial History (Norfolk: Donning Co., 1990), 111.

34. Cuttler, 253.

35. MHT Inventory, M: 31-11, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.

36. "The Schools of Section Four," Chevy Chase Historical Society, http://www.chevychasehistory.org/chevychase/schools-section-four.

37. MHT Inventory, M: 13-52, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.

38. Eleanor L. Cunningham, *Montrose School: The First Ninety Years* (Rockville: Peerless Rockville, 1999), 28-29; MHT Inventory, M: 30-2, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.

39. As architectural historian Karin M.E. Alexis put it, "Clara Barton School represents the transformation of Montgomery County school architecture from the rural school house to the modern civic institution." MHT Inventory, M: 35-51, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search. cfm?search=property.

40. MHT Inventory, M: 34-1, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property.

41. MHT Inventory, F-7-032, http://mdihp.net/dsp_search.cfm?search=property, and E. Guy Jewell, *Montgomery County Public Schools: Schools That Were* (unpublished manuscript at MCHS Sween Library).

42. "About Woodfield ES," http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/woodfieldes/about/index.aspx. Other present-day elementary schools similarly evoke namesake one-room schools, among them Bethesda, Germantown, Olney, and Washington Grove, although to a lesser extent as they are logically named for the localities in which they sit.



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The Earliest Surviving Schoolhouses in Montgomery County