



# The FHHS Alumni Association



*Honoring the Past...Building a Legacy for the Future*

## FAIRMONT HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY

### EARLY YEARS OF FAIRMONT

The school opened as Fairmont Heights Junior-Senior High School, the first Black high school built fully with County funds. Then, as one of only two high schools in the County for Black students, replacing the Lakeland and Highland Park High Schools, its purpose was to serve the Black students generally in the western part of the County.

When opening with an enrollment of 738 students, Fairmont was the fulfillment of a dream for Black citizens who had campaigned actively for many years for a modern high school in the County. And following the many years of struggles and hardships, it also brought a deep sense of pride, as evidenced by the support from the school's communities near the Town of Fairmount Heights, and Blacks living in the western part of the County. As the first high school in the County to offer the twelfth grade to Black children, Fairmont was the fulfillment of a dream for Black citizens who for many years had campaigned actively for a modern high school. This "fulfillment" was reflected by the support Fairmont received, followed by the boost in student enrollment through the 1960s.

During the early years, Fairmont was attended by two-thirds of the Black high school students in the County, bused in from as far as Accokeek in the south, Bowie in the east, and Laurel in the north. (The remaining Black students of the County attended Frederick Douglass High School.) In part, this, and the growth of the several communities from which the students were bused, contributed to the fact that only 10 years after opening enrollment had increased to more than 1,900 students. And to accommodate this, portable classrooms were temporarily utilized.

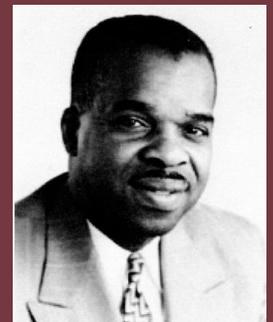
In 1961, Mary McLeod Bethune Junior High School was built two blocks away (now site of Robert Gray Elementary), and the 7th and 8th grade students were transferred to that school. The following year, the 9th grade students moved to Bethune and Fairmont became solely a senior high school.

The opening of Fairmont was the culmination of many years of struggle for the area's Black citizens seeking for their children a modern school facility on par with the several county facilities attended by white students only. While it was a monstrous and unified effort by the local citizens to get the school. Also contributing mightily were two pillars of the nearby Town of Fairmount Heights, already well known to the County Board:



*Doswell E. Brooks*

**Doswell E. Brooks**, Supervisor of Black schools in the County, beginning in 1922, as well as the first Black to be appointed to the Board; and, **Robert R. Gray**, longtime principal of Fairmont Heights Elementary School (1934-70 minus '42- '46 military). Both gentlemen were quite active in many ways in the Fairmount Heights community in which they resided, even before leaving their professional field of education. They both also became longtime Mayors of the town. And, both now have nearby elementary schools named in their honor.



*Robert R. Gray*

Fairmont is located at 1401 Nye Street, in what is now known as Capitol Heights, just outside the easternmost corner of the District of Columbia. The community is roughly bounded by Sheriff Road, Balsam Tree Drive, 62nd Place, and Eastern Avenue. The use of “Fairmont” as the school’s name versus “Fairmount”, as the nearby town is spelled, has forever raised questions. It was once explained that the difference dates to 1934, when the contractor for the then new elementary school erred when constructing that school’s sign and forgot the “u” (later corrected.) Remarkably, that same error occurred during construction of the high school (as contractors reviewed construction details of the elementary school), and again the “u” was not included in the sign for the new school. There then was insufficient time to have that corrected prior to the planned grand opening in 1950. It was never corrected but the school successfully moved forward for 67 years as Fairmont, home of the Hornets.

## BEFORE THERE WAS FAIRMONT

A greater appreciation of Fairmont will be garnered by understanding what came before it in Black high school education in the County. Fairmont is preceded by the Rosenwald Fund, Frederick Douglass High School, Highland Park High School and Lakeland High School. Homage to each is paid in the following pages:



*Julius Rosenwald*

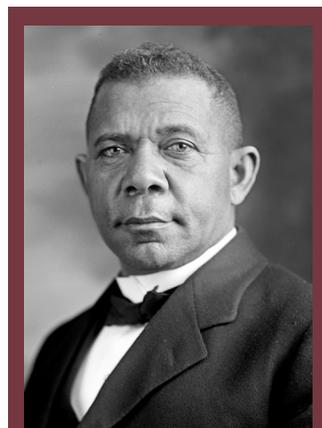
**Julius Rosenwald** (1862–1932), born to a German-Jewish immigrant family, became a clothier by trade. After a few personal business reversals followed by several successes, that made him a very wealthy man, he became a major investor in Sears, Roebuck and Company, ultimately becoming its chairman and president. Upon retirement as president, he remained as chairman until his death in 1932.

But early in his career, even before Sears, Rosenwald had already become a philanthropist, donating millions to public institutions such as hospitals, schools, colleges and universities, museums, fine arts, scientific research and other causes, endeavors he continued even after leaving his active role at Sears.

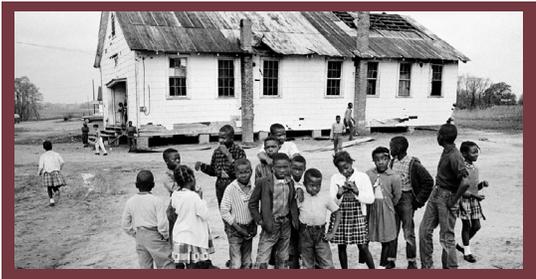
During his early business ventures, Rosenwald had developed a friendship with **Paul Sachs**, a then senior partner at what is now Goldman Sachs. The friendship often led them to discuss the social issues of their time. Frequently such discussions covered the deplorable conditions of Blacks in the U.S. They recognized that millions of Blacks in the South had been disenfranchised at the turn of the century and suffered second-class status in a system of Jim Crow segregation.

Black public schools and other facilities were chronically underfunded. Black education had been the responsibility of the Freedmen’s Bureau, established by the federal government in 1865. And although it had, too, the responsibilities of healthcare and employment of Blacks in the county, the Bureau had built as many as 12 schools, none of which now survives. The Bureau lost its funding as soon as 1872, at which time local school boards took over the management of Black schools.

Sachs, realizing Rosenwald’s great philanthropic desires, and knowing of an ideal situation for such, introduced him to **Booker T. Washington**, who, amongst other great accomplishments, in 1881, at age 25, became the first principal of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Alabama.



*Booker T. Washington*



Washington, with the respect of **U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt**, and many other American leaders, had already obtained financial support from wealthy philanthropists such as **Andrew Carnegie**. But the relationship he developed with Rosenwald led more quickly and directly to aid in further addressing the poor state of Black education in the U.S.

Soon after the meeting of the two, Rosenwald, in 1912, was asked to serve on the Board of Directors of Tuskegee, a position he held for the remainder of his life. Rosenwald endowed Tuskegee so that Washington could spend less time and efforts fundraising and devote more time toward management of the school. Rosenwald, also, soon provided funds to build six small schools in rural Alabama, which were constructed and opened in 1913 and 1914, and overseen by Tuskegee. This is but an example of the benefits that flowed from this partnership.

By today's standards, the mostly wooden Rosenwald schools were simple structures, but they were a significant improvement over the ramshackle huts and lodge halls where Black children already attended classes. "Many of the places in the South where the schools are now taught are as bad as stables," **Booker T. Washington** wrote to Rosenwald in 1912. A dozen years later, little had changed in some places. In its 1924 report on Black schools in Prince George's County, the school trustees said of the Laurel facilities: "We doubt if any of the stables of the Laurel race track would be permitted for a horse if they were as run down as these two places in which teachers are forced to labor." Clearly, this provided more impetus for Rosenwald.

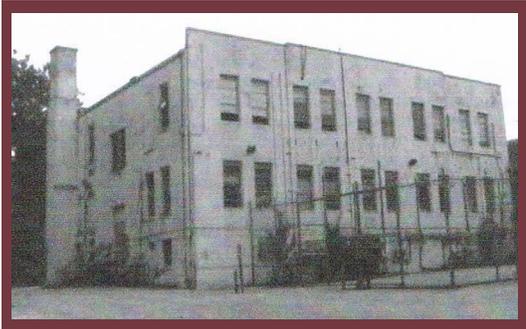
Rosenwald and his family established The Rosenwald Fund in 1917, for "the well-being of mankind." Unlike other endowed foundations, which were designed to fund themselves in perpetuity, The Rosenwald Fund was intended to use all its funds for philanthropic purposes. It donated over \$70 million, a humongous sum in those times, to public schools, colleges and universities, museums, Jewish charities and Black institutions, before funds were completely depleted in 1948.

The school building program was one of the largest programs administered by The Rosenwald Fund. Using state-of-the-art architectural plans designed by professors at Tuskegee Institute, the Fund spent more than \$4 million to build 4,977 schools, 217 teachers' homes, and 163 shop buildings in 883 counties in 15 states, the eleven states of the former Confederacy as well as Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma and Maryland.



The majority of the Rosenwald Schools were built in African American or Native American communities throughout the South. In many instances, the people of the community provided the land, labor, materials and sometimes money for construction of these schools. This cooperative effort between Rosenwald and the citizens of various communities gave a tremendous boost to public education in the 20th century. In Maryland, 149 Rosenwald Schools were built, with 23 in Prince George's County.

## **FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH SCHOOL**



The Marlboro School, a forerunner for Frederick Douglass High School (FDHS) was the first high school for Blacks in the County. In 1922, Mr. Doswell E. Brooks, Supervisor of Schools for Black students, along with many community leaders and The Rosenwald Fund, planned and raised money to build a high school. Mr. Sheldon Sasscer of Upper Marlboro offered the land for this structure. In September 1923, Marlboro High School opened its doors to Black students of the County.

Marlboro School The school consisted of four classrooms where grades 8-11 were taught. This was gladly received by students, some of whom (like many across the County) were previously traveling via trains and trolley lines to Washington or Baltimore to attend Armstrong, Cardozo and Dunbar for their high school education.

A new Marlboro High School was built in 1934, and in 1935 was renamed Frederick Douglass High School. The present Frederick Douglass High School was opened in 1965.

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## **HIGHLAND PARK HIGH SCHOOL**



Built in 1928, Highland Park was the second high school built for black students in the county, and one of the county's 23 "Rosenwald Schools". Highland Park served grades first through eleventh when it opened. There were enough students to begin a class in each high school level because of the availability of a bus to pick up students from Highland Park High School such communities as Glenarden, Glenn Dale, Bowie, Duckettsville, Lincoln, Collington and Fletcher town.

Children also rode the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Electric Railway, which had a stop north of the school at Sheriff Road.

Highland Park served high school students until Fairmont opened in 1950, when it then became an elementary and junior high school for a period. But even before that, the school had been through several changes in its usage and additions to the physical plant to accommodate the growing communities' children. It also was once converted from a school to County offices, but it was converted back to a school in 1999.

The person principally responsible for its revival was Clement Martin, who himself had attended Highland Park when it was a high school (and whose father was one of the school's "trustees" during the initial years), longed for the community to have its school back.

Within the county there are about nine Rosenwald School structures still standing today. Most are currently used for a variety of purposes, but the "born again" Highland Park is the only remaining former Rosenwald School in the county being utilized as a public school.

## **LAKELAND HIGH SCHOOL**



Lakeland High School also opened in 1928 as a Rosenwald School, and shares with Highland Park the title of second high school in the County for Black students. The Lakeland opening followed petitions to the County Board of Education for construction of a high school for Blacks from a delegation of Black Lakeland (College Park) residents, who were later joined in the petition by delegations from other Black communities such as Ammendale (Hyattsville), Bladensburg, Brentwood, North Brentwood, Muirkirk, Laurel, and even Elkridge of Howard County. Likely several more communities, whose names have been lost because of the nearly 90-year history of city/town consolidations and incorporations, were also involved. These were communities mostly along or slightly to the east or west of U.S. Route 1, from Mt. Rainer up to Laurel.

The petitions eventually resulted in the Board agreeing to advance funds to purchase the land, with the stipulation that the delegations select the site, and the communities be obligated to repay that advance over a period of several years. Construction funding of the building was provided by the Rosenwald Fund.

The school opened with two teachers and 45 students enrolled in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. It ultimately was offering education through the 11<sup>th</sup> grade before it converted in 1950 to an elementary and junior high school.

Edgar Smith, Sr. was Lakeland's first principal, serving from the opening in 1928 until 1966, a span that covered the 1950 conversion to an Elementary & Junior High School as the high school functions moved to the new Fairmont Heights High School.

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## **FAIRMONT HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL**

### **Acquisition of Land used for Fairmont**

In the late nineteenth century, the area that would become Fairmount Heights was the site of several small farms owned by the Wilson, Silence, Hoover, Brown, and Wiessner families. These farms were purchased and consolidated by land speculators in the first decades of the twentieth century. Fairmount Heights contains six subdivisions platted between 1900 and 1923 by different developers. The first was platted as Fairmount Heights in 1900 by Robinson White and Allen Clark, two white attorneys and developers from Washington, D.C. The initial platting contained approximately 50 acres that were divided into lots typically measuring 25 by 125 feet. Robinson White and Allen Clark encouraged Blacks to settle in the area and the subdivision became one of the first planned communities for black families in the Washington, D.C. area. White and Clark sold the affordable lots making home ownership attainable for many black families. The neighborhood, as home to several prominent African-Americans including William Sidney Pittman, a noted architect and son-in-law of Booker T. Washington. Pittman took an active interest in the development of his own neighborhood. He formed the Fairmount Heights Improvement Company to construct a social center for the community. Pittman had Charity Hall constructed, which was used for social events, such as a church, and as the community's first school.

In 1908, the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Electric Railway opened, providing easy access for commuters into Washington, D.C. Residents of Fairmount Heights used the neighboring Gregory Station, located in Seat Pleasant.

Blacks, encouraged by the development in Fairmount Heights, soon settled in the area. In addition to the Pittmans, James F. Armstrong (supervisor of Colored Schools in Prince George's County), Henry Pinckney (White House steward to President Theodore Roosevelt), and Doswell Brooks (successor to Armstrong as supervisor of Colored Schools in Prince George's County and the first Black appointed to the County's Board of Education) all constructed houses in the neighborhood. Fairmount Heights was also home to a growing professional community and many residents worked as clerks or messengers for the federal government, then viewed by Blacks as highly successful and respected positions.

Growth in the community caused a pressing need for a dedicated school, which resulted in the construction of the Fairmount Heights Elementary School. Designed by William Sidney Pittman, the school opened in 1912. But because of the substantial number of families increasingly moving to Fairmount Heights, that school soon proved too small, requiring a new elementary school, that opened in 1934.

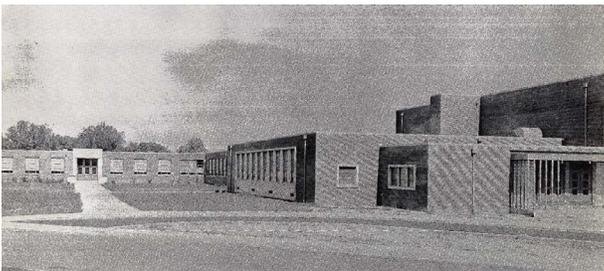
In 1935, William Hiller conveyed 24.70 wooded acres to George I. and Louise A. Eppard. George moved to Washington, D.C. from McGaheysville, Virginia, as a youth, and in 1911, graduated from the George Washington University Medical School, after receiving his undergraduate degree from there as well. Living at 601 Minnesota Avenue, N.E., the Eppards raised a large family of four sons and six daughters.

In 1947, of the approximately 25 acres conveyed from Hiller, the Eppards conveyed 15 of such acres to The Board of Education of Prince George's County, then retired to Compton, Maryland. Not long afterwards, that property was used for the building of Fairmont.

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## **FAIRMONT**



*Fairmont Heights High School*

Fairmont opened in 1950 as Fairmont Heights Junior-Senior High School. It was one of two high schools for Black students in Prince George's County, replacing Lakeland and Highland Park High Schools. Therefore, it was charged with serving the Black students generally in the western part of the County.

## **FAIRMONT CURRICULUM**

The students of Fairmont had choices of educational paths, General, Academic (college prep), Vocational and Commercial. Commercial students were prepared to enter the workforce (primarily the Federal Government) upon completion of the Civil Service Examination. Development of typing and shorthand skills were of primary focus. The young men who chose the Vocational path could select from auto mechanics, bricklaying, print shop, interior decorating, wood and metal shop. The young ladies could choose cosmetology. Students choosing the Academic path could take science courses such as biology, chemistry and physics. Math subjects included Algebra I and II, Geometry and Trigonometry. Four years of a foreign language were also offered. In addition to Spanish, French became an offering starting in 1958.

Course offerings and curricula changes occurred throughout the years. Academies of Law and Public Policy, Finance and Bio-Technology were introduced.

The lack of “activity buses” in the earlier years, meant that students participating in extracurricular activities had to rely on their parents or other sources for after school transportation. Making great struggles and sacrifices to participate, some even resorted to hitchhiking. Nonetheless, sports teams were competitive, clubs flourished and the choir and band were among the best. One of the early pupils at Fairmont was a talented young music student, then named Marvin Pentz Gay, Jr., better known by his stage name, Marvin Gaye, always fondly remembered by music teacher, Dessie Smith. However, Marvin later attended Cardozo.

Fairmont, in preparing students for the real world had a very strict dress code. No shorts or tennis shoes were allowed except on the athletic fields and gym. Young ladies could not wear pants, only dresses or skirts and blouses. Young men had to wear shirts with collars.

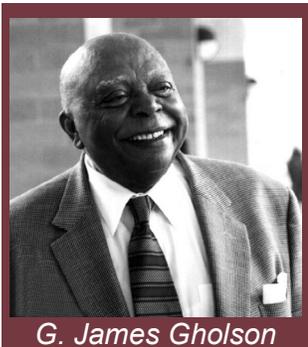
Assemblies in the gymnasium were often cultural experiences with performances by the National Symphony Orchestra, Washington Ballet Company, the Dance Group from Gallaudet University, etc.

Each spring the gymnasium was transformed into a ballroom for the Junior-Senior prom. In June, the gymnasium hosted a 4-day event known as the graduation exercises. It began on Friday evening with Class Night. Sunday was Baccalaureate Service. Monday was Awards Assembly which include an Investiture Service with the “Passing of the Baton” from the Seniors to the Juniors. At the Service, Seniors formed a circle around the gymnasium as the Juniors moved into the Senior’s seats. Graduation was Tuesday.

Initially, Fairmont had no athletic teams. That changed when in the early 50’s a group of junior and senior male students staged a walkout of classes. They did not leave the building, just walked the halls. Ultimately in a meeting with the principal a basketball program became a reality.

The bringing together of kids from the many involved Fairmont communities also created numerous conflicts and physical confrontations, as the kids for the most part had no prior exposure to one another, and knew little about each other. These conflicts and confrontations gradually ebbed over many years. But what is important to be remembered is the camaraderie and respect that materialized as well, as the weekend teen parties and social events became open to all students regardless of the communities from which they came. That was naturally followed by inter-community friendships, dating (the cause of many of the conflicts), love, marriage, inter-family unions, etc. Those positive vibes spread to the parents, and continues even today in so many fashions. Many alumni will attest to the fact that as youths they never imagined they could ever feel so comfortable living where they now are, in what was once considered the “enemy” territory, as we’ve become a more transient and accepting society.

## FAIRMONT PRINCIPALS



*G. James Gholson*

G. James Gholson served as the first principal at Fairmont, a post he held until 1969. A graduate of Hampton Institute in Virginia (Bachelor and Master of Science degrees), Gholson integrated the lessons he learned there with his teaching philosophy at Fairmont Heights. He continued his education with extensive graduate work at New York University, George Peabody College, Columbia University, the University of Maryland, and Penn State University. At Fairmont, he instituted a curriculum influenced by the humanities, stating later that, “our feeling was that education was a total process – involving a Broadway play, a walk in the garment district– not just the cramming of facts into a student’s head. Facts should help you with living.”

Gholson further instituted the “core method,” a program that at the time was only used in a few private schools. This method set aside three-hour blocks of time for students and teachers to approach issues by using the Socratic dialogue approach. Such issues taken up were “the good life, the morality of peace and war, and the nature of economic relations in a democratic society.”

He left Fairmont in 1969 upon his appointment as Administrative Assistant to the Assistant Superintendent of Schools at the central office. At the county level, Gholson served as Administrative Assistant to the Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education where he was the master architect of the system-wide desegregation plan and played a key role in the implementation process. He was recognized in Newsweek magazine for his role as the architect and engineer of the desegregation plan, and coauthored an evaluation instrument for administrators in Prince George’s County Public Schools which has been replicated in the public schools in Louisville, Kentucky; New Castle and Wilmington, Delaware; Laurel, Mississippi; and Seattle, Washington. Gholson’s legacy continues as a giant in public education. He is remembered as a scholar, master teacher, administrator, and an advocate for the children of Prince Georges’ County. He is recognized for doing a masterful job of getting the school underway, and of carefully steering it during the tumultuous early integration years. He achieved an enviable record of distinguished service. G. James Gholson Middle School, in Landover, Maryland, was dedicated in his honor on May 2, 2003.



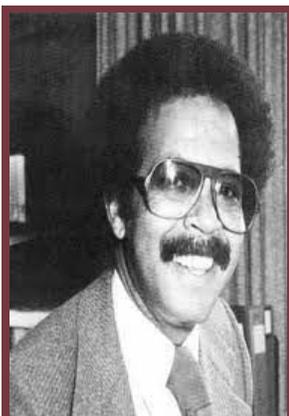
*Alvin V. Fortune*

Gholson was followed as principal by **Alvin V. Fortune**, a Newton, Massachusetts high school teacher. He had been one of four Harvard Graduate School of Education students who had designed a plan the County adopted to help comply with a 1968 HEW order to eliminate segregation of public schools. Fortune served from 1969-1972.

Following Fortune was Dr. Donald A. Kiah, who served as principal from 1972-1978, during what many consider to be the most tumultuous period of the school due to Alvin V. Fortune matters related to the 1972 Desegregation Order.



*Donald A. Kiah*



Clarence McDonald

In 1978, Clarence McDonald became principal, a position he held for 17 years, second only to the 19 years served by Gholson. In his early years, he was tasked with steering Fairmont through catastrophic and fundamental changes to the plant and facility.

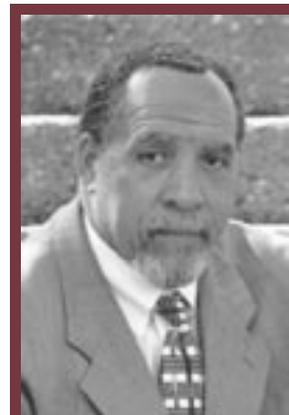
A fire at Fairmont on January 4, 1980, caused \$500,000 in damage. In 1981, Fairmont moved into the unused Kent Junior High building while the school's interior was completely renovated, but at a cost of \$8.4 million. Fairmont reopened in its original location in August 1983, a modernized, air-conditioned plant with many windows, a new library media center, exercise and weight training rooms, data processing centers, music facilities, refurbished classrooms, and bright hallways--and with a returning ninth grade class from the simultaneously closing Bethune Junior High, again making Fairmont a four-year high school.



Dr. Carolyn D. Blue

In 1995, Dr. Carolyn D. Blue was appointed Chief Educational Administrator (CEA), a title for principal under the "Cluster Concept" used during Superintendent Jerome Clark's administration. Dr. Blue served from 1995-2003.

Richard Jones was principal at Fairmont from 2003-2005, followed in 2005 by alumnus Peggy Nicholson, a 1968 Fairmont graduate.



Richard Jones

Peggy Nicholson was followed in 2009 by Nakia Nicholson (*no relations*)



Peggy Nicholson

Torrie Walker became a principal in 2013. Although leading the administration of a 900-student school, she also immediately became immersed in aspects of the "to-be-built" new Fairmont, making critical decisions regarding design that will impact the day-to-day operations of the new school.



Nakia Nicholson

Ms. Priester, current Principal, has been an educator for 22 years. She has served in the capacity of teacher, counselor, mentor teacher, assistant principal, and now principal. She has been committed to the students of PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS for the last 14 years and is excited about her new role as principal at Fairmont Heights High School. Her vision is to ensure that Fairmont Heights' school environment provides a space where all students will actualize their goals.



Torrie Walker



Lonice Priester

## DESEGREGATION ISSUES AND THE IMPACT ON FAIRMONT

Throughout the early history of Fairmont and up until the early 1970s, the school was a proud, virtually all-Black institution. However, with the landmark United States Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), Fairmont became the focus of numerous initiatives over nearly the next 20 years to desegregate Prince Georges' County schools. These initiatives included the "freedom of choice" plan, the "Model Urban School" plan, and extensive busing of students to and from area schools.

None of these initiatives initially resulted in any meaningful change in school integration. Finally, in 1968, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare told the Board of Education that by September 1969, a plan should be implemented to eliminate all vestiges of segregated public schools. One plan suggested around this time suggested that Fairmont be closed and its then 928 students be bused to neighboring Central and Bladensburg High Schools.

That plan was fiercely opposed by faculty and the community and put on hold. Instead, a "Model Urban School" proposal was rolled out to be managed by Mr. Alvin Fortune as principal, and several Harvard Graduate School of Education graduates who would serve as assistant principals. Ultimately, the "Model Urban School" plan was also scrapped, ending Fortune's term as principal.

Mandatory desegregation began with 1970-71 school year and busing was adopted to achieve desegregation goals. A *Washington Post* article of September 1, 1970, following the first day of that school term at Fairmont, reported that 236 of 441 Whites and 352 of 609 Blacks attended school that day. The attendance numbers soon afterwards increased and for the most part the opening days were uneventful, pleasing then Principal Alvin Fortune, and then County Superintendent Carl Hassel. However, loop holes in already loose transfer rules of the "choice program", resulted in the original 40%+ White student population dropping quickly to only 21%. Then as the "Whiteflight" from attendance zones accelerated, this percentage dropped even further. So by August 1971, the federal government concluded that the County was not in compliance with its mandates, and threatened to withhold federal funds.

By 1974, the county had become the largest school district in the United States forced to adopt a busing plan. Because of court orders, litigation, and changing demographics, Fairmont underwent years of traumatic upheavals.

Federal litigation and the school busing order were officially ended in 2001, as the "remaining vestiges of segregation" had been erased to the court's satisfaction. Neighborhood-based school boundaries were restored. Because of the race-based legal activities, County Schools were ordered to pay the NAACP more than \$2 million in final attorney fees, and it is estimated that the school system paid more than \$20 million, in total, over the course of the years-long litigation.

## **ATTEMPTS TO CLOSE FAIRMONT**

In the 1970s there were five separate attempts to close the school and send its students to neighboring schools. Each time the School Board proposed a plan to close the school, the community rallied together. With the aid of local political leaders such as Nathaniel Exum, Decatur Trotter (both former Maryland State Senators), and Tommie Broadwater, a Fairmont alumnus and the first Black County resident elected to the State Senate, convinced the Board that the school was a historic landmark for Black residents and must be allowed to survive. Deborah Franklin, a 1973 graduate of the school stated: “Every time the school board tried to close the school, people would come out in big numbers and then the Board would back down. There’s a lot of emotion tied up in the school. People felt that it was something that needed to be maintained.”

## **ATTEMPTS TO CHANGE SCHOOL NAME**

In 1983, the Board initially approved to change the name of Fairmont to Jesse J. Warr High School, after the first Black member elected to the school board and a leader during the desegregation era in Prince George’s County. Another reason given for the renaming of the school included ending the confusion of how to spell “Fairmont” vs. “Fairmount,”. Warr had died in 1976, and the fact that a Board member had given a promise to Warr’s surviving family members and his North Englewood community to name the school after him, contributed significantly to this effort.

That name change, which was to go into effect in 1984, met with fierce opposition from current students and faculty, alumni, and community members. Opponents were clear that they were not against the commemoration of Warr’s legacy, but the name “Fairmont Heights” was more significant. Delegate Sylvania Woods, Jr., whose district encompassed the area around the school and town stated, “There’s no question that Jesse Warr was a great man...but it would be the same as turning Howard University into Martin Luther King University.”

Lawrence Jackson, an alumnus of the school and son of the first vice principal emphatically said during a school board meeting, “Fairmont Heights has guided us. As we do not change a family name, we should not change that of Fairmont Heights.”

It became clear that dedicated support for “Fairmont Heights” and testimonies by numerous students, faculty, alumni, and community members led to the Board tabling the motion to re-name the school.

## **NEED FOR A NEW SCHOOL**

In 2007, a Feasibility study was conducted to determine if a new Fairmont Heights High School should be constructed for the community, for which a public hearing was held.

Primary issues voiced were the age of the existing facility, instructional impediments to learning, and athletic and training needs. After reviewing four options presented in the Feasibility Study and hearing the concerns of nearby residents at the February 14, 2007 public hearing, the determination was made to construct a school on a new site. The County Public Schools’ staff recommendations were as follows:

- 1) Build a new school on a new site:
- 2) Renovate, modernize, and preserve the existing building as a facility for learning, community use, alumni use, and athletics; and,
- 3) The existing facility could remain as a museum to celebrate Black achievement in Prince George’s County.

Pursuant to this followed by numerous other deliberations, construction of a new school did not ultimately commence until June 2015. The original Fairmont Heights High School was in October 2010 designated an historical site. Plans for future uses of the building are still being developed.

## **THE NEW FAIRMONT HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL**



September 2017, students and faculty, led by Principal Torrie Walker, commenced the 2017-18 school year (Fairmont's 68th) at a brand-new campus at 6501 Columbia Park Road Hyattsville, MD, 20785. It is a state-of-the-art facility designed for 951 students, in a building with the latest in technology. Multiple display monitors throughout the building provide information for students, staff and visitors. Smartboards allow students interaction with the classroom teacher and other students. Rooms have been specifically designed to house the various course offerings at the school to include Environmental Sciences, IT Academy, the TDC, special educational programs. Each student will have an electronic device (Chrome Book) that houses their textbooks. Facilities include multiple gymnasiums, auditorium, media center, career research center, a lighted football stadium, concession stand, ticket booth and restrooms. There are fields for baseball, softball, hockey, as well as outdoor tennis courts and basketball courts. In all, a facility that will promote the continuation of the significant, impactful and epic history of Fairmont.

**We are Hornets forever.  
Our work never ends!**