

History of Clarksburg Elementary School

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Town History

Clarksburg is one of Montgomery County's oldest intact towns. Its earliest beginnings go back to about 1735 when William Clark of Lancaster County, PA started coming to the future town site to trade with the Shawnee, Tuscarora, and Seneca Indians. At first he traded from a wagon but soon afterwards, he built a log building near the intersection of two famous Indian trails. This intersection of the "Old Sinequa Indian Trail" which has evolved over the years to become the present Frederick Road and a westward trail now approximating the location of Route 121 became the future site of Clarksburg.



Within a few years the "Old Sinequa Indian Trail" became the major road connecting Georgetown and Frederick. Dowden's Ordinary, an inn in Clarksburg established by Michael A. Dowden, became a convenient and important stopping point for travelers. It is said that this inn provided lodging or entertainment for such notables as George Washington, General Braddock, and Andrew Jackson.

As the town grew, John Clark, son of William Clark, built a permanent general store. In addition to being a merchant, he was a justice of the peace, a county commissioner, a deacon of the Methodist Church, and the first postmaster of Clarksburg. It's no wonder that the town took his name as its own.

The town continued to grow and by the 1850's it was the third largest town in Montgomery County after Rockville and Poolesville. Clarksburg had become a center for industry and trade with several inns and taverns, general stores, blacksmith shops, wheelwright shops, shoemakers, mills, and distilleries to name a few of its businesses.

Early Clarksburg Schools

In 1833 the Clarksburg Academy, a private school, opened and operated on Stringtown Road not far from Frederick Road. The school was considered to hold a rank between elementary and college level. The academy went out of existence in 1878 when it turned its holdings over to the Board of Commissioners of Public Schools for Montgomery County according to the writings of Clarksburg historian, Ralph Martz. However, based on the writings of another historian and educator, Guy Jewell, the first public school at that site was built in the early 1860's. Jewell's account indicates that in 1860, the Board of Commissioners was organized with Leonidas Wilson, owner of the Wilson Store in Clarksburg, serving a two-year term. That year the Board authorized a one-room public school to replace the Clarksburg Academy at a cost not to exceed \$300. Henry C. Hickson was one of three Clarksburg citizens to take a public school teacher's exam and is believed to be one of Clarksburg's first public school teachers, if not the first. A teacher's salary at that time was approximately \$284 per year. Children were expected to pay \$1 per term, needy children being exempt. This was not looked upon favorably by the

citizens. They felt that since Montgomery County now had a free public school system, there should be no term fees at all. Children attended school for 10 months with the school year divided into a winter, spring, summer, and fall school term. Since attendance was not mandatory, it was not surprising that the winter term had the highest attendance with the poorest attendance occurring during the summer.

In 1878 public schools for African-American students were authorized to be built in Montgomery County. That year a lot was purchased for \$50 on Frederick Road near the site of the present community center in order to build a school for African-American students in Clarksburg. The first record of an African-American public school teacher in Clarksburg is Virginia White who taught in 1880.

Clarksburg Elementary - In the Beginning

In 1906 the Board of Commissioners determined that Clarksburg needed a new school building. Funds were insufficient at that time and it wasn't until 1909 that the two-room schoolhouse presently standing at Clarksburg Elementary was built.

The earliest records of activities we have at our school date back to the minutes of the first organized PTA meeting in 1938. Seventeen parents and a teacher were in attendance as well as Mary Morningstar, the principal. In addition to her many duties as principal, Miss Morningstar taught classes, kept the fire going in the wood stove, and maintained the school. During the World War II years, she sold war stamps to the students and helped organize drives for newspapers, magazines, tin, and grease. In 1945 an addition of a third schoolroom was built onto the back of the existing schoolhouse. Miss Morningstar then had a volunteer set up a makeshift kitchen area with a cook stove. With the help of students and donated food from local farms, Clarksburg Elementary was able to serve a hot lunch to the children. The cafeteria was sponsored by the PTA and eventually operated on a self-supporting basis. The elementary school, however, did not yet have indoor plumbing or central heat. Within the next two years a bathroom was added to the right of the front entrance.

1950's and 60's

In 1951 plans were made at Clarksburg to add a general purpose room, two classrooms, a kitchen, an office, lavatories, and a boiler room to the west side of the old schoolhouse. This first major addition of a modern brick wing took place in 1952. The first kindergarten class at Clarksburg attended that year. The first Spring Fair, then called the May Festival also took place that year. Only three years later another brick addition of four classrooms was added to the east side of the old schoolhouse.

Up until the early 1950's the road leading back to the school was Route 121. It was relocated to its present site when Interstate 270 was built through Clarksburg. The original Route 121 in front of the school became a dead end street and was renamed Redgrave Place.

In 1952 the school for African-American students in Clarksburg was closed. The students in Clarksburg were bused to the new Taylor Elementary in Boyds while the white students in Boyds attended Clarksburg.

On May 23, 1954 the Supreme Court ruled that segregation of public schools was unconstitutional. On April 23, 1956 the Montgomery County Board of Education adopted a policy of integration for the 1956-57 school year. Even though the secondary schools and approximately half of the elementary schools began to integrate, the process was slow. It was not until the early sixties that Clarksburg became fully integrated. One of the reasons stated by the

school board for the delay in integration in certain schools was that they would become overcrowded with the addition of extra students. This was probably the case at Clarksburg since a major addition to the school building was in the planning stage at that time.

In the late 1950's the Clarksburg community became concerned about the escalating cold war and discussed some early plans for civil defense. An evacuation of Bethesda's Wyngate Elementary (later known as Alta Vista Terrace Elementary) to Clarksburg Elementary was tentatively planned in case of atomic attack. In 1962 the Civil Defense Administration instructed our school to follow a program of take-cover drills. Parent discussions were held at the school about fallout shelters and what to do in the event of an atomic attack. It was determined that there would be one hour to get the children home before radioactive fallout became a danger if an atomic attack occurred in Washington, D.C. Memories of this fearful time still linger vividly in the minds of many who attended public schools during that era.

Four more classrooms, an all-purpose room, a new kitchen, and a new boiler room were added to Clarksburg in 1960. This new wing connected to the 1952 addition to form an L-shaped structure.

In 1962 the Montgomery County Recreation Department began offering summer programs in Clarksburg. That same year the old Clarksburg schoolhouse was remodeled with new blackboards, and the old African-American schoolhouse on Frederick Road was torn down. Playground equipment was later installed near the former site of that school.

Two more classrooms were added to the end of the newest brick wing of Clarksburg Elementary in 1967.

1970's and 80's

In 1972 the old schoolhouse was moved to its present location and a new entryway, office, and media center were built in its place. Additional classrooms and storage space were added behind this area. The 1945 addition on the back of the old schoolhouse was in poor condition so it was decided to remove that portion and eventually restore the old structure to its 1909 condition. The schoolhouse was used briefly to house the sixth grade then Headstart held its classes there until the most recent modernization. It is hoped that our old schoolhouse will eventually be used as a museum. We are quite fortunate to have this designated historic building still standing on the school grounds. A few times during the 1960's, the PTA requested that the Board of Education tear down the old school and replace it with a modern, more compatible addition. Fortunately at those particular times, the necessary funds for such an undertaking were not available.

The gymnasium was added to the school building in 1974. This was the last of the numerous additions that occurred before the modernization in 1993 took place.

On February 20, 1975 the schoolhouse was listed on the National Register of Historic places. This was due to the old schoolhouse being a wonderful example of an early 1900 educational building. The old schoolhouse was rededicated on November 4, 1982 in a special ceremony and celebration that included student speakers, community members, and five former 1909 students.

In 1984 the family of Maxine Rogers, Clarksburg's first Physical Education teacher, began a tradition of honoring students who exhibit exemplary sportsmanship throughout the year. Many students in the years since that first award have been recognized for their outstanding physical skills and excellent character that Mrs. Rogers instilled in students while teaching at Clarksburg.

1990's - Present

During the 1992-93 school year the long-awaited renovation took place. Students and staff were displaced to other schools during the construction. Kindergarten and first grade attended the then newly opened Lois P. Rockwell Elementary. Second and third grade went to Woodfield Elementary and grades four through six went to Cedar Grove. Our Headstart students were housed at Sally K. Ride Elementary. After a hectic year housed in four different schools, students returned in September 1993 to a beautifully renovated and modern school facility. The new building was air conditioned throughout and featured a computer lab where students could utilize technology in their learning. This event was commemorated by a rededication ceremony on November 7, 1993.

In 1999 a beloved teacher, Robert Turner, passed away. His passing was a sad event for the many students and staff who had the good fortune to work with Mr. Turner. The community organized a drive to name our gymnasium for Mr. Turner to honor his many years of contribution to the Clarksburg area both through his many years of teaching and coaching with the Montgomery County Recreation Department. These efforts came to fruition when the gym was renamed the Robert L. Turner Gym in 2000.

As the town of Clarksburg began to grow so did the population of the school. In 2002 Clarksburg got the first portable classroom, affectionately called a 'Learning Cottage'. Each year brought more students and more portables. In 2006 the school reached its highest enrollment of 740 students. Every available space was utilized as well as 10 portable classrooms to house this large number of students.

The following year Little Bennett opened to relieve Clarksburg of our overcrowded state. The fifth grade class remained here as Little Bennett only opened to grades Kindergarten through fourth grade. That fifth grade was the largest class ever to be promoted to middle school from Clarksburg. There were six fifth grade classes and over 160 students in the Clarksburg class of 2007.

As society became increasingly aware of the fragile environment, so did Clarksburg Elementary. In 2006, as a part of fourth grade's project based learning experience students and staff began a garden habitat. Fourth grade students continued to add to and maintain the habitat that provides food and shelter to various types of butterflies, birds, and other small wildlife creatures. In the spring of 2008, our garden met stringent requirements and was recognized by the Wildlife Federation as a Certified Habitat. We also increased our efforts in recycling, energy conservation, and educating students about the importance of the environment and the impact they can have as stewards for protecting it. We were recognized for these efforts in 2008 when we received the prestigious status of being named a Maryland Green School.

In the school year 2008-09 in our continuing efforts to stay current with the latest technology we received a Promethean Board. This is an exciting interactive tool for teachers to use in instructing students and ushers in a new era of technology for our school.



November 4, 2009 marks the 100th anniversary of the opening of Clarksburg Elementary. May the next 100 years be as extraordinary as the first!

Our Centennial Celebration slogan is "a golden past... a bright future." I believe this historical account of Clarksburg Elementary should help all who read it gain a small understanding of our rich heritage and an appreciation of a new era in the education of our children.