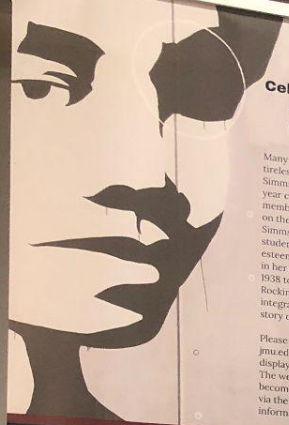




Celebrating Simms
traveling exhibit installed
at the Bridgewater branch
of the Massanutten
Regional Library, May 2021



Celebrating Simms: The Story of the Lucy F. Simms School

Many people in the community have been working tirelessly for years to tell the story of the Lucy F. Simms School. This exhibition, the result of a multi-year collaboration between Harrisonburg community members and James Madison University students, builds on their work. Enslaved before the Civil War, Lucy F. Simms settled in Harrisonburg and taught over 1,000 students across three generations, becoming the most esteemed educator in the Shenandoah Valley. Named in her honor, the Lucy F. Simms School was built in 1938 to serve African American students from all over Rockingham County and the Shenandoah Valley until integration came to Harrisonburg in 1965. This is the story of that school and the community it served.

Please visit the companion website (<https://omeka.lib.jmu.edu/simms>) to find out more about the images on display here and to view additional archival materials. The website will be updated with new artifacts as they become available, and we welcome you to contact us via the website to provide any comments or additional information.

A Community of Faith



Aunt Lucy, from Daingerfield's
Our Mammy and Other Stories (1906)

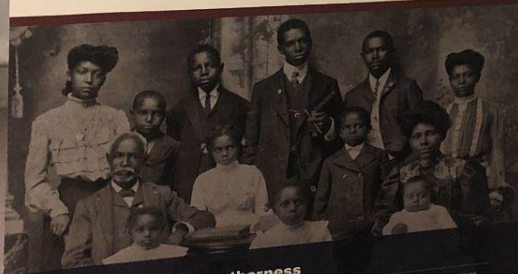
Before the Civil War, traditional education was denied to enslaved African Americans. However, religious instruction was sometimes tolerated and became a primary gateway for early African American education.

On the Gray plantation of Hilltop, one of the Gray children, "Miss Dovey," devoted herself to teaching the older slaves to read the Bible. One student in particular, known as "Aunt Lucy" to the white community, used these Bible lessons to teach the younger generation, and is believed to be the grandmother of future educator Lucy F. Simms.

Harrisonburg's freed black population used similar Christian knowledge and values to push successful appeals through the Virginia General Assembly that would allow a freedman to stay in Harrisonburg to be near his enslaved wife, children, and friends.

"Aunt Lucy seldom gave one of her brood a good word, but soon betide anyone else who gave them a hard one."

—Nettie Gray Daingerfield



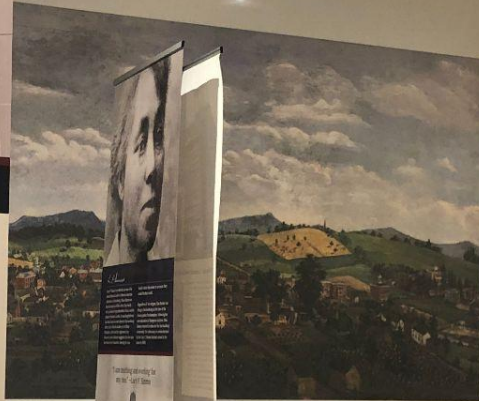
A Community of Togetherness

During segregation, many towns surrounding Harrisonburg were known as "sundown towns," where white communities prohibited African Americans from being within the city limits after dark. Harrisonburg was more welcoming than these neighboring towns, making it safer for African American families to build a community. The Newmans (pictured above ca. 1909) were early trailblazers in the community, working in

education, business, and for federal agencies. George A. Newman came to Harrisonburg in 1875 as principal of the "colored school" and worked here in education for almost 30 years.

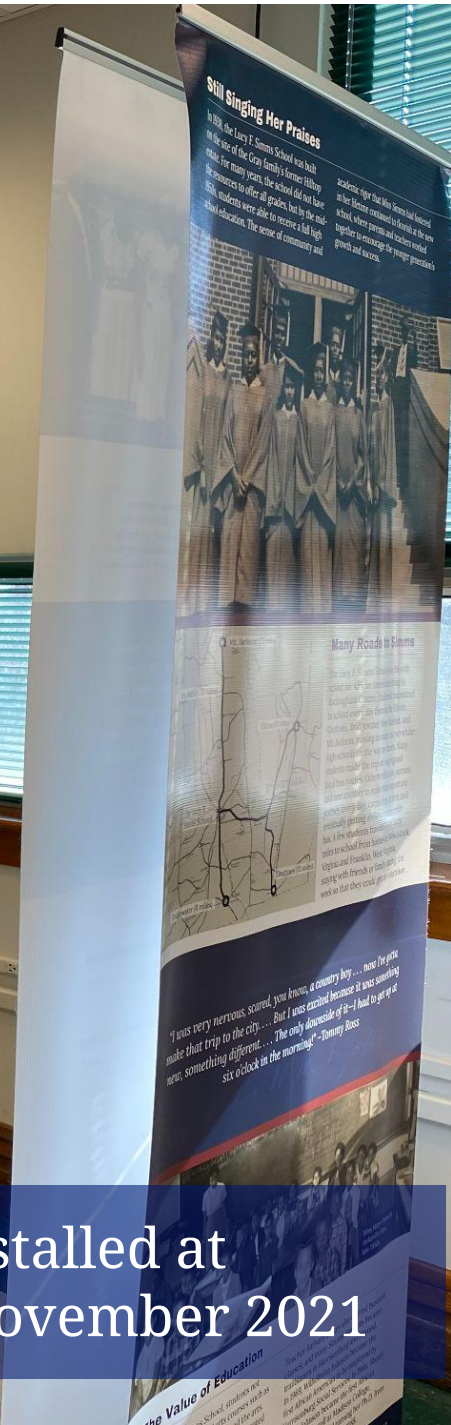
"So we must rise in self defence, though hostile we may be. And show, by using common sense, that we will still be free."

—George A. Newman



Celebrating Simms traveling
exhibit installed at Rocktown
History in Dayton, August 2021

Celebrating Simms traveling exhibit installed at Hillyard Middle School in Broadway, November 2021



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A Community of Faith

Celebrating Simms
traveling exhibit
installed at the Virginia
Mennonite Retirement
Community in
Harrisonburg, March
2022



Lucy F. Simms

Lucy F. Simms was born in 1840 in Rockingham County, Virginia. She was enslaved before the Civil War and later became a prominent educator in the Shenandoah Valley. Her dedication to education and community service is remembered through the Lucy F. Simms School.

"I am now living and working for my race" - Lucy F. Simms



An Opportunity at Harrisonburg

The school was founded in 1938 to serve African American students from all over Rockingham County and the Shenandoah Valley until integration came to Harrisonburg in 1965. This is the story of that school and the community it served.



Before the Civil War, traditional education was denied to enslaved people. However, the Mennonite community in Harrisonburg provided a primary gateway for early African American education.

On the Gray children, "Miss Doves," devoted herself to teaching the older slaves. From 1860 to 1880, the Mennonite community used these Bible lessons to teach the younger generation and is believed to be the first African American educator in Harrisonburg.

Harrisonburg's population used similar Christian knowledge to push successful appeals through the Virginia General Assembly that would allow a freedman to stand in 1865.

The exhibit at Rose
Library, James
Madison University,
May 2022



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A Community of Faith



Before the Civil War, traditional education was denied to enslaved African Americans. However, religious instruction was sometimes tolerated and became a primary gateway for early African American education.

On the Gray plantation of Hillsop, one of the Gray children, "Miss Doves," devoted herself to teaching the children as "Aunt Lucy" to the white community, known as "Aunt Lucy" to the white community, used these Bible verses to teach the younger generation, and is believed to be the grandmother of future educator Lucy F. Simms.

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A Community of Togetherness

During segregation, many towns surrounding Harrisonburg were known as "sundown towns," where white communities prohibited African Americans from being within the city limits after dark. Harrisonburg was more welcoming than these neighboring towns, making it safer for African American families to build a community. The Newman family (pictured above ca. 1903) were early trailblazers in the community, working in education, business, and for Federal agencies. George A. Newman came to Harrisonburg in 1875 as principal of the "colored school" and worked here in education for almost 30 years.

"So we must rise in self defence, though humble we may be. And show, by our common sense, that we will still be free."

-George A. Newman