



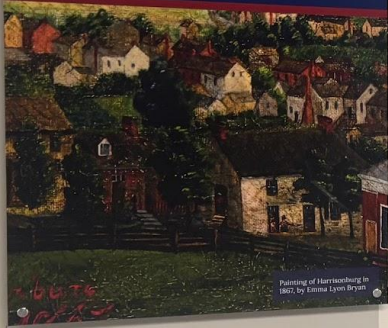
Celebrating Simms
exhibit installed at
Rocktown High
school on August 13,
2026

A Community of Growth

The end of the Civil War emancipated large numbers of African Americans who had previously been denied education.

Harrisonburg received aid from the government-sponsored Freedmen's Bureau, which enabled formerly enslaved persons to buy property, obtain an education, and find employment. The Bureau sent three teachers from New England to establish the first schools for African Americans in Harrisonburg, which were held in hotel rooms and church basements. After Virginia instituted a state public school system in 1862, Harrisonburg

After Virginia instituted a statewide system of public education in 1870, African American education moved from these informal spaces to dedicated one-room schoolhouses. Sixteen schools for African Americans operated at various times in Rockingham County.



A Community of Hope

Outside of Harrisonburg, African American education flourished in Athens, a small town to the north later renamed Zenda. Formed in 1869 around a plot of land given for the purpose of erecting an African American church, Zenda became one of the most prosperous African Americans communities in the county. Many Zenda residents owned property, and education and religion were key aspects of life.

Instruction was held at the church, known as Long's Chapel, until a dedicated school building was erected in 1882. Students came from miles around to attend, furthering Zenda's status as a beacon of African American advancement.

After 1900, the population of Zenda began to decline with the migration of African Americans to cities. Restored in 2009, Long's Chapel stands to this day as a symbol of the fellowship and progress for the African American community in Rockingham County.



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 below ca. 1900) were early trailblazers in the community, working in education, business, and for Federal agencies. George A. Newman came to Harrisonburg in 1879 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 using common sense, that we will still be free."*

-George A. Newman



A Community of Progress

In 1882, the Effinger Street School was built in Harrisonburg and became the primary center for African American education in Rockingham County until 1936. As the Newtown neighborhood grew around it, Effinger Street School became the focus of a tightly-knit community of faith and family. It served as a community center and a thriving and resourceful school. Harrisonburg's African-American teachers were ambitious and progressive educators. They formed the Colored Teachers' Association, which held monthly meetings where they read papers, held discussions, and showcased student papers of various teaching techniques.



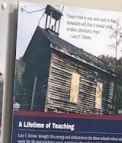
An Opportunity at Hampton

In 1974, Larry J. Simms founded a therapeutic hotline in Virginia, a school founded with the mission of educating young adolescents "about our 'bad' people." *Jim Simms graduated in 1977, just one year after the first 12 Virginia Tech school's first (senior) graduate class*. *Virginia, Jim Simms' education was not consistently the standard in biological sciences research over 3000 students across five generations. The was also founded a biological publication, which began to be for energy and accomplishments. In 1972, he started a school, which was the first in the world and the same time, he started a school for research in the world, we will wonder, perhaps the first, and the first in the world. How does this school? How does this school? How does this school?*



A Lifetime of Teaching

140 J. *Times* brought this story and indicated the three athletes who spent just 20 weeks working on training at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in 2007. I don't see it as all that unusual for a 16-year-old to be brought out of the basement of the Georgetown Catholic Church, then, under the joint support of the club and his mother's work as a professional in the same sector. Certainly the young nature of athletes provides the construction of a life-size *School*, where the three have played for half a lifetime. However, when, for the next 12 years, in college, we find out what was the situation, a correspondence with her, showing close work with coaches, high expectations, and respect.



Community Leader and Activist

It is critical, Kim Stern responded in the north of her community with longfingers and eyes because most of her



"When I calculate the time I have been teaching by years, it seems quite a while, but, when I calculate by dollars and cents, it seems but a short while."

-Lucy F. Stone



Mayor Deanna
Reed and
panelists



Seán McCarthy,
Mollie Godfrey,
and Billo Harper





Social Life

The majority of Newtown's social gatherings took place in homes around the neighborhood, and festive lawn parties were often held in people's yards. Lawn parties were known for their bright string lights, singers, homemade ice cream, country ham sandwiches, and good company. Newtown residents also spent summer days relaxing at community spaces like Harris Pool, built thanks to the vision and fundraising leadership of Mr. Kent Frances, a local African-American businessman. Ruth M. Toliver describes her "fondest memories of growing up" as "memories of Harrisonburg. . . . It was just one of the communities where you felt safe."

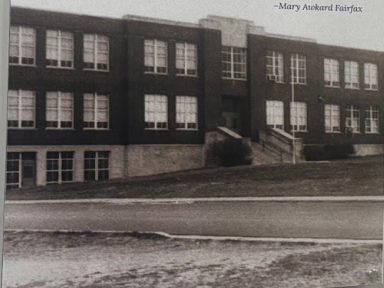


Integration

The Lucy F. Simms School closed as a part of national school integration, with the class of 1965 being the last to graduate. Many teachers at Simms, Fairfax and Barbara Blakey went on to teach in integrated schools such as Waterman Elementary School and Harrisonburg High School.

While African Americans in Harrisonburg and across the country were granted greater educational opportunities, many of them felt they lost a sense of community as a result of integration.

"They lost the school. And it has never been the same."
—Mary Aunkard Fairfax



Reconnecting with the Past

The Lucy F. Simms School was left officially vacant for many years after its closing, although certain groups used the building, such as The Ave neighborhood would later establish a reunion committee to bring former classmates back together. Their first reunion was held in 1982, and many others came later. These efforts began the process of reclaiming past friends and neighbors.

SECOND REUNION

Elizabethtown School



Lucy F. Simms School

"We just don't see many contributions to pass on the heritage we received from the experiences of Elphinstone Street and Lucy F. Simms schools, who did not have the good sense to be their own history."

—The Reunion Committee, 2002



MAY 24-26, 1985



Continuing Education

After extensive renovations, the Lucy F. Simms Continuing Education Center was founded in 2005. It now supports after school and community organizations that use its gymnasium, computer lab, and bookstore. As the organization that was in the ground, computer lab, and bookstore, it is the home for many community events such as the Great Entrepreneur and home for many community events such as the Great Entrepreneur and home for many community events such as the Great Entrepreneur.

"The Lucy F. Simms Center is where we started from. We used to have to rent out other buildings for our class reunions, but we're fortunate to have use of the center now."
—Betty Lou Wiley

"Having lived beside it for many years, it's nice to see the old school being put to good use. The center has helped bring back some memories from childhood."
—William Martin

"The Lucy F. Simms Center means a lot to the community. I hope that everyone will support the wonderful work that has been done in remembrance of the school."
—Sharon Barber

"Lucy F. Simms School is more than a building; it is the foundation of who we are as African Americans in the Northeast Community. The legacy of this building has generations of African Americans together."
—Deanna Reed





From left to right: Emmitt Lee, Alice Davis, Leewood Davis
NAACP President Marlon Copeland,
NENA President Karen Thomas

Superintendent
Michael Richards
and panelists



Panelists from left to right: Billo Harper, Howard Curry, Tim Van Schaik, Colleen Morris, Ryan Henschel, Kelly Troxel, and Michael Richards

