

Manassas Industrial School/Jennie Dean Memorial History

After almost a decade of fundraising by Miss Jennie Dean, the Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth was chartered on October 7, 1893. Frederick Douglass conducted the opening ceremonies on September 3, 1894.

Before the school was founded, Dean began a Sunday school in Manassas, which evolved into a church called Colony Chapel. Under Dean's guidance, four more churches opened in the years before 1893: Prosperity Chapel in Loudoun County, Catharpin Calvary Baptist, and Dean-Diver Chapel in Manassas.

Dean told African American residents of Northern Virginia to
Keep your children at home. Don't send them to the cities. You must buy your land; become taxpayers. Make all you can and save all you can. Meanwhile, I will go out and raise the money to build a school where your children can be educated to trades. You do your part and I will do mine out in the world.

Described as a person of great organization and determination Dean is credited with establishing formal and informal educational opportunities for African American children in Northern Virginia. The ideals presented in her pamphlet of rules and good behavior were the crux of the school's aims. According to the school's catalogue, "the aim is not to make young men and women craftsmen; the aim is to make craftsmen better men and women"

At the height of its existence, the campus of more than one hundred acres had a dozen buildings, all constructed from private finances and donated labor and materials, and helped train an average of 152 students per year. A prosperous farm provided food and dairy products, and made the school somewhat self-sufficient. An annual fair displayed the school's agricultural and trade accomplishments.



The School survived as a private institution until the 1930s. In 1937, the public school systems of Fairfax, Fauquier, and Prince William counties formed a joint board of control and purchased 100 acres of land and the buildings to establish a regional high school for African-American students. This three-county partnership remained until the 1950s, when Fairfax and Fauquier built their own segregated schools. In 1954, Prince William County consolidated its African-American students from Brown Elementary School of Manassas with the Regional High School and the school became known as the Regional High and Elementary School.