



## A Walk Through African American History

When in 1924 the Prince William School Board informed the Brown School, located on Prince William Street, that it needed running water and sewers to stay open, it said no money was available to help the struggling school. The Manassas African American community would not let their school close. By 1926, they raised enough money for a new school building on Liberty Street, and Dr. John Williams - a prominent physician and Brown alumnus - personally purchased and installed radiators and laid a water line to the school in the heat of summer.

The Brown School played an important role in educating young African Americans when schools were segregated. Its story—and many other stories that document the struggles and triumphs of African Americans in Manassas—will be brought to light in the first phase of a sign project that will eventually form a city-wide interpretive trail.

Other signs that will be installed this summer will feature African American entrepreneurs who provided services and goods in a segregated town; veterans and the American Legion Post 114, founded in 1946 when African American veterans were denied membership in White veteran's organizations; and the historic Rose Hill Cemetery, established as an African American burial ground.

Choosing which stories to tell has been the work of a citizen committee collaborating with staff: Myra Brent, who also serves on the Architectural Review Board; Dr. Thurma Goldman, President of the Jennie Dean Education Foundation; Linneal Naylor, who descends from the enslaved Naylor family of Liberia; E.J. Scott, Vice



*Photo from the Manassas Museum collection thought to be Brown School students*

President of the Prince William Area NAACP; and Lyshawn Dean, Warwick Steer; and Don Wilson, who all serve on the Manassas Historic Resources Board.

"These markers will finally get the rich history of the African American community in very visible locations," Manassas Museum Curator Mary Helen Dellinger says. "These stories have remained largely untold, or folded into the larger story of White Manassas history, so it's time to tell them in their own right."

Although African American history signs will eventually be located throughout the City, along with existing signs that mark notable local history, the early focus will be on the historically African American neighborhoods. A 1917 segregation ordinance restricted African Americans to neighborhoods south of the downtown railroad tracks, so a Museum intern working on the sign project focused research on Lincoln, Grant, Douglas, Prince William, Jefferson, Lincoln, McKinley, and School Streets, tracing land deeds and conducting oral interviews with longtime residents.

Another Museum intern researched aerial and insurance maps to help recreate the location of buildings on and near the Manassas Industrial School (MIS) campus in anticipation of an interpretive walking trail on the MIS/Jennie Dean Memorial site. That trail will complement the recent update to the Memorial, which now includes a plaza with a statue of MIS founder Jennie Dean. The site already includes a kiosk with information about the school, its buildings and Jennie Dean.

An interpretive sign that tells the story of Liberia's enslaved was installed in fall 2020 at Liberia House Historic Site. At Grace United Methodist Church, another interpretive sign, commemorates the slave dwelling on the former Clover Hill Farm. Visiting these sites will be a fitting way to commemorate February's Black History Month. Visit [manassascity.gov/parks](http://manassascity.gov/parks) to find out more.