

DID YOU KNOW?

Not all Africans came to Virginia in chains during the colonial period. Benjamin Lewis, a black servant on a plantation in what is now Prince William County, filed a complaint in the county court on 20 May 1691. Lewis claimed that he was free in England, and had been brought into this country under a contract to serve four years, just as white indentured servants were. His contract, signed in England on 11 June 1686, is among the records of Stafford County. His master, William Harris, claimed the paper was forged. The jury found that the contract was valid and ordered Lewis's release. William Harris appealed the decision, but records of the appeal's outcome are unfortunately lost. William Harris died in 1698 and was buried near Neabsco Creek and Route 1. Later, in the twentieth century, his tombstone was moved to Pohick Church in Fairfax County, where it may be seen today. We don't know what became of Benjamin Lewis.

Dumfries drew international attention to itself in 1963. It was the first municipality in Virginia to elect an African American to public office since the era of Reconstruction after the Civil War. During the time when some parts of Virginia experienced massive resistance to integration, Wilmer Porter, proprietor of a local auto repair business, was elected to the Dumfries Town Council. His wife Mary was one of four black teacher chosen about the same time to begin the pilot desegregation program in Prince William County schools. Wilmer Porter served as a member of the Town Council until 1980. Mary Porter retired after 16 years teaching at Dumfries Elementary School. In 2005, the Porter Traditional School was named in her honor.

Lucasville Road, south of Manassas, got its name from Lucasville, a community founded by freed slaves. Lucasville was named for the family of Charles Lucas, a former slave of the Johnson family of Bloom Hill, who was 80 years of age in 1880. By 1880 the community had become the largest African-American village in central Prince William County, with a population of over 100. A one-room school, number 5 in Manassas District, opened in Lucasville in 1883, and remained in operation until 1926. A decline in attendance then led to its closing and its students being bussed to the Brown School in Manassas. Between 2005 and 2008 Lucasville School was dismantled and reconstructed through the efforts of citizens, County officials and Pulte Homes, Inc. It is possibly the oldest surviving one-room school building in Prince William County and is now located at 10516 Godwin Drive in Manassas. The school is open by appointment and for special events and programs.

A slave woman in Prince William County was the inspiration for one of the men who joined John Brown's raid and gave his life at Harper's Ferry, an event leading to the American Civil War. Dangerfield Newby, a freedman, had tried unsuccessfully to purchase the freedom of his wife, Harriet, and seven children, owned by Dr. Lewis A. Jennings of Brentsville. In desperation, Newby agreed to help Brown foment a slave uprising in order to rescue his family. During the battle at the Harper's Ferry arsenal, he was the first of Brown's company to be killed, Oct. 17, 1859. After his death, three poignant letters from his wife were found among his belongings. In her last letter she said "I want you to buy me as soon as possible, for if you do not get me some body else will . . . their [there] has ben one bright hope to cheer me in all my troubles, that is to be with you ..." It is believed that she and her children were sold away to Louisiana a short time later.

Prepared by the staff of Bull Run Regional Library; updated January 2013



Chinn Family Home, 1987

BLACK HERITAGE IN PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY 1731—2006

Prince William Public Library System
Prince William, Virginia 22192
<http://www.pwcgov.org/library>



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FINDING ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

You may find additional material in the library's catalog. Try some of these subject headings: AFRICAN AMERICANS—GENEALOGY; AFRICAN AMERICANS—VIRGINIA FREE AFRICAN AMERICANS—VIRGINIA; SLAVERY—VIRGINIA; UNITED STATES—CENSUS; UNITED STATES—ARMED FORCES—AFRICAN AMERICANS

IN OUR RESEARCH WE LEARNED...

The Chinn Regional Park, Chinn Aquatics and Fitness Center and the Chinn Park Regional Library were named to honor Mary Jane Chinn and her family. Mary Jane and Tom Chinn were slaves who, after emancipation, purchased several hundred acres along what was formerly Davis Ford and Telegraph Roads in Woodbridge and were instrumental in the founding of Mt. Olive Baptist Church and the town of Agnewville.

By 1810 almost a fifth of all free Blacks in the United States lived in Virginia. By 1860 there were nearly 60,000 free Blacks in Virginia. At the time of the Civil War, one in ten Blacks in Virginia was free.

Recurring family names of "free Negroes" owning land in Prince William County include Bates, Cole, Gaskins, Lucas, Nickens, Pinn, Robinson, Thomas and Williams.

The first secondary school for African Americans in Northern Virginia was founded in Prince William County in 1894. Born into slavery, Jennie Dean of Catharpin (1852? - 1913), was the guiding force behind the founding of the Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth, a privately endowed campus with dormitories for students from out of town. Located at Prince William Street and Wellington Road, the school be-